



VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

PO Box 408594, Chicago, IL 60640 - (773) 276-4189

www.vvaw.org
vvaw@vvaw.org

March 2007

Dear Supporter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War,

I want to let you know how much we appreciate your donations to support the work of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. You enable us to make a much bigger difference toward ending the war and getting decent treatment for all veterans.

More and more active duty troops are opposing the war in Iraq. Over 1700 active duty soldiers have taken the risk to sign the Appeal for Redress, a petition to Congress calling for withdrawal from Iraq. Petitioning Congress is a legal act, but these individuals are exposing themselves to whatever informal harassment the military may decide to do. The consequences of such harassment could be minor or they could be life-threatening.

Beyond opposition, more troops are refusing to fight. The Pentagon estimates that over 8,000 soldiers have gone AWOL since the beginning of the Iraq War. Some have made their refusal public. Ehren Watada is the first officer to publicly refuse deployment to Iraq. Vietnam Veterans Against the War, along with other organizations, has actively supported Lt. Watada.

We did media work for his father's tour of the north and southeast that raised public awareness of Watada's case and for part of his mother's speaking tour of the Midwest. A VVAW member from Northwest Indiana took a leading role in setting up speaking events for Watada's mother in Indiana and in Chicago. **With the help of your donations, we were also able to make a financial contribution.**

Watada's court martial last February ended in a mistrial. We hope that will prevent his being tried for this "offense" a second time, but we do not know what will happen if he again receives orders to deploy.

Another war resister, Kyle Snyder left his unit when he returned from Iraq. He escaped to Canada where he began to establish a life. His lawyer made what seemed like a successful arrangement with the military, that he could return to Ft. Knox and receive a discharge. Kyle left Canada and went to Ft. Knox per the agreement, but instead of receiving a discharge he was ordered to report to his unit at Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri. His unit was about to deploy for the second time.

Kyle went AWOL a second time. Many individuals and organizations supported him as he toured the United States, speaking out against the war. Vietnam Veterans Against the War invited Kyle to speak at our events in Cincinnati and in Chicago. We facilitated a psychological report documenting his Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, that Kyle hoped would enable him to receive a discharge. Unfortunately, the military did not take that course, but attempted to arrest him at two different sites while Kyle was on a speaking tour of the west coast.

Kyle went back to Canada. The U.S. illegally had the local police arrest him at his home. An uproar ensued, with local and national Canadian politicians denouncing the violation of Canadian national sovereignty. Kyle was released and the outrage about his arrest will probably strengthen the ability of U.S. war resisters to live in Canada.

Since Kyle is not yet legally permitted to work in Canada, he still needs donations to help him reestablish his life. Vietnam Veterans Against the War supported Kyle last year and will do so again by co-sponsoring a fundraiser for him in Chicago. One of our members is a prime mover in organizing the event, which will also provide the first opportunity for members of the new Chicago Iraq Veterans Against the War to participate in a public Speak-Out against the war.

Meanwhile, Ray Parrish, our military counselor continues to offer badly needed advice and support to veterans and GI's who call him for help. **It is only through your generous contributions that Vietnam Veterans Against the War is able to offer this vital free service.**

Ray recently told me that he has received even more calls from active duty troops who have been educated by the publicity about Lt. Watada. They tell Ray that serving in Iraq violates their conscience, but they know they cannot get Conscientious Objector status unless they are opposed to all wars. Many have told Ray that they should have done what Watada did, come out publicly against the war before deployment to Iraq.

Carolyn, a woman veteran of Iraq, was in a very bad situation. She was desperate because she was homeless and she was suffering from disabling Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result of combat and sexual assault in Iraq. The VA had erroneously cut her off from medical and psychological treatment because she had passed a two-year limit for automatic eligibility. The VA frequently makes such "mistakes" because they are so underfunded they are unable to handle the deluge of returning Iraq and Afghanistan vets needing services.

Ray was very worried that Carolyn might attempt suicide because another desperate woman veteran had recently jumped off a garage at the same VA facility when she came in for emergency services and was told to wait for her regular psychiatric appointment.

Ray's first priority was to reassure Carolyn that he could help her so that she would not feel so desperate and alone that self-destruction would seem to be her only way out. Through his contacts, he got housing for her, and arranged for effective advocacy so that she could continue her treatment.

Recently I received a call from Gold Star father Juan Torres telling me that a Spanish-speaking mother had called him to get help for her son who was scheduled to deploy to Iraq. Although I am of Mexican descent, I don't speak Spanish, but I was able to get one of our supporters who is a professional interpreter to call the mother. The son happened to be home at the time, so the interpreter was able to both talk to the mother and to give the English-speaking son Ray's number directly.

Our members all over the country continue to speak to high school and college classes. VVAW member John Ketwig, author of *And a Hard Rain Fell*, has done talks at the Naval Academy, at John's Hopkins and at colleges and high schools near his home in northwest New Jersey.

His local high school is located in a rural area and it is quite heavily recruited. When the kids talk about patriotism, he tells them that patriotism would be great if your country would take care of you. He tells them about troops without armor on their Humvees, duct tape holding their gas masks together, and about soldiers damaged by depleted uranium that is used by the U.S. but whose low-level radiation damages civilian and military personnel alike. He tells them about young men leaving sperm donations in a sperm bank before they deploy in case they are exposed while in the military. He talks about his own experience in Vietnam and his exposure to Agent Orange, which he believes caused his 14 day-old baby to die.

He tells them that of nine local guys who came home from Iraq together, only one is still with his wife. Five of the nine have committed suicide. He tells them about a local girl who was raped by her CO in Iraq, but was harassed by fellow soldiers for reporting the crime.

Brian Slease of Kent, Ohio, has been showing the American Friends Service Committee video, *Before You Enlist* at his local high school. The video really draws kids to his table. In one visit he signed up 18 students to a pro-peace list serve. The school has been very cooperative and will be sending opt-out letters to parents of juniors and seniors. (The No Child Left Behind Act mandates giving the military student information unless the student or the parents sign an “opt-out” form.)

Vietnam Veterans Against the War had a good-sized contingent in the January 27th anti-war demonstration in Washington. We held a post-march gathering where members of our organization networked with each other, with members of Veterans For Peace, and with Iraq Veterans Against the War. Some VVAW members will be joining the March 17th events in Washington, DC or at Fort Bragg, NC. Many more will participate in local anti-war demonstrations on the 4th anniversary of the start of the Iraq war.

VVAW members who couldn't get to DC supported the January 27th activities locally. Texas VVAW joined Veterans For Peace in lining up on overpass bridge railings with banners, flags, and signs to remind the public that opponents of the war are the majority, and that we will not be silent. Moscow Idaho VVAW members participated in a local January 27th anti-war march. On the night of the State of the Union Address, they held a vigil with a big banner saying “Yellowcake” (referring to the false evidence that got us into war) and passed out pieces of yellow cake to passers by.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War has endorsed HR 508, Lynn Woolsey's bill that calls for the prompt withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq and the repeal of the law authorizing Bush to use force in Iraq. We have notified the press of our endorsement and hope to get some coverage for this excellent bill. (As a non-profit, VVAW is permitted by law to spend a very small portion of its budget on lobbying.)

We are very excited that Aaron Hughes, an artist and an Iraq Veteran, has agreed to work for Vietnam Veterans Against the War part-time. As VVAW grows, we need to put more and more time into keeping ourselves organized, and Aaron is going to be a big help with that. He will help our military counselor, and he will serve as our liaison to Iraq Veterans Against the War.

Aaron has his art on exhibit at the National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum in Chicago, and his show will soon move to Madison. We are proud to have played a role in his getting the Chicago Chapter of Iraq Veterans Against the War up and running. A VVAW contact offered to donate money to send a veteran to the January 27th march against the war in Washington. We saw to it that Aaron got this scholarship, which enabled him to meet Iraq Veterans Against the War leaders in person. The in-person discussion was the key to his ability to start the new Chicago chapter. He will also serve as the Iraq Veterans Against the War Regional Coordinator for the Midwest.

We were excited to meet members of the new Madison chapter of Iraq Veterans Against the War when they came to our post-march gathering in Washington. With their input, we are starting a small advertising campaign in Madison newspapers, publicizing their chapter and our military counseling program. As a pilot project, we will place six weeks of classified advertising in two Madison newspapers plus a display ad in the Madison-based paper, The Onion.

We continue to make plans for the celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the founding of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. The event will be held in Chicago the weekend of August 4th. One new development is a “Peace and Sustainability” veterans' bike ride from the VVAW event in Chicago

to the Veterans For Peace convention in St. Louis on August 16th. West Coast VVAW and VFP member Lane Anderson is taking the lead in organizing the ride.

I hope you feel a well-deserved sense of satisfaction to know about the work your contributions have helped make possible. We know that you cannot make a contribution every time you receive an update, **but if you are able to donate again at this time, it will strengthen our capacity to continue to struggle against this war that has cost our country and cost the Iraqi people so much in lives, injuries, and money that could have been used for making our country and our world a better place.**

For peace and justice,



Barry Romo
VVAW National Coordinator



Harold & Carol Trainer and Marty Webster at VVAW Kentuckiana anti-war protest, January 2007.

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.

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