



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.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War has consistently opposed the war in Iraq and has 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 gave them a hearing because they knew they had served in combat themselves. In the lead-up to the war in Iraq, VVAW began to grow. New members joined, old members came back, and VVAW played a leading role in the anti-war movement.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War's recent accomplishments have been to:

- Protest the war
- Offer Military Counseling to veterans and active-duty GI's
- Encourage young people to find careers other than the military
- Support active-duty soldiers who resist the war
- Speak out in the media
- Help homeless veterans
- Support Iraq Veterans Against the War
- Teach the lessons of Vietnam to a new generation.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War has participated in anti-war vigils and marches in cities across the country. Everywhere they appear wearing their VVAW T-shirts and carrying VVAW banners that say, "Honor the Warrior, Not the War," they reinforce the message that the people with the most direct experience of war think this war is wrong.

VVAW activists speak against the war in hundreds of high school and college classes every year, bringing the lessons of Vietnam to a new generation. Their presence is sorely needed to counter the extremely well-funded efforts of military recruiters, who seek out students whose economic vulnerability makes them easy targets for their often misleading messages. The military has the law on its side when it requires schools to give out students' contact information to recruiters unless they or their parents specifically "opt out." But VVAW members are committed to passing out "opt out" forms that will protect students from these potentially lethal sales pitches.

Your financial support will help them reach even more students. The students who listen and decide to stay out of the military will avoid the risk of death, lost limbs, brain damage, and other physical and psychological injuries.

Counter-recruitment actions can bring immediate results. A Chicago Vietnam Veterans Against the War leader gave a class presentation and later 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.) The next Veterans Day, the student was a featured speaker at the VVAW Veterans Day event and was quoted in several newspaper articles. He has since become active in counter-recruiting at high schools in Hispanic neighborhoods.

Every Veterans Day and Memorial Day, VVAW holds events and draws media attention, so that the right's effort to use these holidays to glorify war does not go unchallenged. Vietnam Veterans Against the War has appeared in over a hundred stories on television, on the radio, and in print, notably in a profile of VVAW national coordinator Barry Romo on page one of the Wall Street Journal. A VVAW member was also featured on PBS's Jim Lehrer News Hour as he spoke to classes at an African American High School, urging students not to join the military. In summer 2007, a New York Times article credited Vietnam Veterans Against the War for its role in helping war resister and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Iraq Veteran Eugene Cherry avoid jail time and get a discharge from the military that preserves his access to VA health benefits.

It was Vietnam Veterans Against the War's Military Counselor, Ray Parrish, who played a pivotal role in Eugene Cherry's case. The organization had not had paid staff in decades, but, three years ago, the support of people like yourself enabled VVAW to hire Ray. 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.**

To help Eugene Cherry, Ray lined up a pro-bono psychologist – a member of VVAW – who documented his Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Ray and the psychologist accompanied Eugene throughout the Army legal procedures. Ray also obtained the support of Citizen Soldier, who launched an effective media campaign on Eugene's behalf. Throughout the dark days when it looked like Eugene might face eight months in jail, Ray offered emotional support, sometimes on a daily basis. Eugene finally prevailed with a General Discharge under Honorable Conditions and is now a speaker and activist with Iraq Veterans Against the War.

Meanwhile Ray continues to serve other veterans and GIs. He 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 that he taught. Dennis (not his real name) had not reported to the military to be shipped out to Iraq. He 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.

Ray also helps veterans with PTSD get therapy, provides information and support to soldiers whose rights are being violated by the military, and enables veterans who are denied VA health benefits because of "less than honorable" discharges to get those discharges upgraded.

Sometimes veterans who call Ray want to deal with their PTSD in political ways. For example, John left the military after two tours in Iraq. He was thinking about talking to classes at his old high school but was very hesitant: speaking publicly against the war or the military seemed like treason. Ray encouraged him to go ahead.

John then talked to several classes. He called Ray and told him that telling his "younger brothers and sisters" that what they hear from recruiters is misleading was the best therapy he could ever have had. He thinks that he persuaded some students who otherwise would have joined the military.

Your tax deductible 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.

In addition to Eugene Cherry, Vietnam Veterans Against the War has offered financial, media, and personal support for other war resisters. Their member psychologist provided pro bono psychological reports for two additional AWOL soldiers. One VVAW leader remains in weekly contact, offering his friendship and moral support.

Many Vietnam Veterans Against the War members have offered veteran-to-veteran personal support to individual Iraq Veterans Against the War in their cities. VVAW organizes its activists to distribute Iraq Veterans Against the War brochures at community colleges and VA hospitals, and they have included publicity about Iraq Veterans Against the War in their newspaper ads for their own Military Counseling program. They have made financial contributions, and they participated actively in recent Iraq Veterans Against the War street theater actions.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War leaders join with other veterans, often playing central roles, in setting up "Arlington West" or "Arlington North," (named after Arlington National Cemetery). These displays of tombstones or crosses commemorate U.S. deaths in Iraq. They are very moving to people of all views on the war, and they concretely emphasize the cost of war in American lives. Media coverage amplifies the message.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War has brought out a report on the "Crisis in Veterans' Health Care" to expose the hypocrisy of the Administration's cutting veterans' healthcare. They have hosted events for the Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange and their current law suit to receive some compensation from the American chemical companies whose products brought them cancer and birth defects, in numbers even higher than the numbers of U.S. troops affected.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War's 2007-08 program includes:

- Opposition to the Iraq war
- Support for war resisters
- Support for Iraq Veterans Against the War
- Intensive media work to communicate their anti-war message
- Military counseling for GIs and veterans in an anti-war context
- Exposing the hypocrisy of 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

All of this is done on a shoestring. Most of the work of the organization is done by volunteers. 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.

Your donation will help VVAW reach more homeless Vietnam veterans, providing them with food and helping them to begin their healing, which is now decades overdue.

Please make a generous tax-deductible contribution today.

Sincerely,



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



VVAW Marching in Washington DC, January 27, 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.

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