



VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

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Dear Supporter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War,

Thank you for your generous support of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Without you we could not be such a strong a voice for veterans and for ending the war in Iraq.

I write to you today at an incredible moment in history. The end of the Bush era. Even now there is a part of me that can't quite believe it

Even before Obama begins his presidency, there are forces at work that want him to slow down his timetable for withdrawal from Iraq, extend the occupation if the military thinks it advisable, and establish permanent US military bases there.

This is a critical period. Policy is not made by one man only but by all of the active political forces. Our organization and the anti-war movement as a whole must be active and vigilant if we are to counteract those who want to prolong the war.

With your continued help Vietnam Veterans Against the War will be there, carrying on the fight for veterans, peace and justice.

You may remember from the previous Vietnam Veterans Against the War update that, **thanks to your generous financial contributions, we are able to support Iraq Veterans Against the War's field organizing program.** I am particularly excited about one IVAW active duty organizing pilot project that is in the planning stages.

Active duty members of Iraq Veterans Against the War who are not in IVAW chapters are often isolated on their bases. IVAW is planning to bring a number of them to the Seattle, Washington area where the Fort Lewis IVAW active duty chapter is located.

The Fort Lewis chapter has developed a relationship with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union. The two organizations have developed a plan for a joint training in organizing skills. Organizing on a person's military base is very similar to organizing within a person's workplace. The active duty IVAW members from around the country and rank and file members of the Longshore Union will jointly receive training from experienced organizers from both organizations.

Then they will put their training into practice on the base, meeting soldiers, talking with them about the problems they encounter in the military, and inviting them to come and learn more about Iraq Veterans Against the War. Afterwards, the trainees will evaluate the success of their efforts. If the program works, it can be repeated at other military bases. The Fort Lewis IVAW chapter can then take care of long term follow-up and can incorporate

the soldiers that came from the base into their work.

On Veterans Day, Vietnam Veterans Against the War members across the country worked with Iraq Veterans Against the War, Military Families Speak Out, and Veterans For Peace to publicly call for an end to the war in Iraq. We had a great victory in Long Beach, California. Last year, the anti-war veterans and Military Families Speak Out contingent was not allowed to march in the city-sponsored Veterans Day parade.

California VVAW member Jan A. Ruhman became so angry about being excluded that he drove up from San Diego to speak before the city council. He began networking through VVAW contacts from back in the day to put political pressure on the city of Long Beach. This resulted in a successful meeting with the veterans groups who were opposed to the participation of visible anti-war veterans. The upshot was that Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Veterans For Peace, Iraq Veterans Against the War, and Military Families Speak Out (MFSO) marched with their banners in the official Long Beach Veterans Day Parade.

Milwaukee Vietnam Veterans Against the War joined an anti-war rally at the Milwaukee Court House. Among the speakers were a city supervisor and school children reading their essays about peace and Veterans Day. The featured speaker at the Chicago Veterans Day event was Tomas Young, a paralyzed Iraq veteran who is the subject of the new film, *Body of War*. VVAW marched in city parades officially or unofficially in New York, Atlanta, Boston, Indianapolis, and participated in other events in Ann Arbor, Cincinnati, Baltimore, and San Diego.

Your donations continue to make it possible for Vietnam Veterans Against the War to employ Ray Parrish, our full time military counselor. Ray continues to receive an increasing number of calls and emails from veterans, GIs, and military family members from all over the country. Many of these calls reflect the psychological strain that the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have had on veterans and GIs.

Many veterans suffering from PTSD end up with less than honorable discharges that prevent them from getting treatment in the VA and make it impossible for them to get the compensation that is available to other injured veterans. Ray helps these veterans to get psychological evaluations showing that their PTSD caused the behavior that resulted in the less than honorable discharge. Military Discharge Review Boards then can upgrade their discharges to honorable so that they are eligible for benefits

Ray has been working with Karen (not her real name), the wife of Mel, a soldier who served in Iraq. Mel is being evaluated by the military to see if he is eligible for medical retirement for PTSD. He was experiencing repeated delays in getting his medical retirement and Mel and Karen were having problems getting help from the VA. Ray has been helping them with the VA's red tape, as well as helping them organize their own support group of veterans and family members who are also dealing with PTSD and VA hassles.

Ray is currently supporting Charles, an Afghanistan veteran whose PTSD worsened greatly during his second tour. It got to the point that his commanders took his weapon away and then returned it to him without ammunition after sending him for three days of treatment.

He then spent his last three months on guard duty with an unloaded weapon. This added significantly to Charles's trauma because he felt completely helpless. He concluded that his commanders were intentionally trying to get him killed.

Charles went AWOL. He trusted no one, and only called Ray because he had an untraceable phone card. He is much too suspicious to enter any kind of treatment. He does not intend to turn himself in in order to get his situation regularized. Now there is a warrant out for him for desertion.

Ray has built up enough trust that Charles continues to call him, even though he never gives Ray a number to call him back. Ray did succeed in getting Charles to go to a meeting of the National Association for Mental Health, whose chapters now all have veterans' committees. Charles actually attended because it was possible for him to be completely anonymous. Ray is hoping that he will continue to call and get to a point where he can trust someone enough that he can get treatment for his PTSD.

Ray's article *Beating Bogus Discharges* in the November 2008 edition of *The Veteran* (available online at www.vvaw.org) provides further information on discharges, disability ratings, and the likes. Ray continues to provide indispensable services to the veterans, GIs and militarily family and friends he comes in contact with.

Many other Vietnam Veterans Against the War members are active in counseling GIs and other veterans. Aaron Davis of Salt Lake City does military counseling on a volunteer basis and answers calls that come in to the GI Rights Hotline. He takes helping soldiers very personally because his two sons are both facing second deployments to Iraq.

Aaron helps soldiers who want to leave the service. Just recently, Aaron received a call from Jerry, who had signed up for the Army's Delayed Entry Program, in which high school students sign up but wait until graduation to go to Basic Training. Jerry changed his mind, but didn't know what he could do. Aaron told him that all he had to do was to write a letter to the recruiter's Battalion Commander saying that he had changed his career goals. Aaron helped him with the letter and warned him that the recruiter might well try to get him to change his mind, but that he was under no obligation to take the recruiter's calls or go to a meeting with him.

In addition to military counseling, Aaron is active with a chapter that includes both Vietnam Veterans Against the War and Veterans for Peace members. They have formed a relationship with both the local Iraq Veterans Against the War and with the local American Indian Movement. They helped both groups get banners. The American Indian Movement marched in the fall anti-war mobilization in Salt Lake City.

Thanks to you, Vietnam Veterans Against the War has been able to fund the Midwest Iraq Veterans Against the War office and pay for the salary of their staff person.

Having a staff person has made a tremendous difference. With the office open only for a year, they now have 70 members in the Chicago area and 250 in the Midwest Region. They sent the largest contingent of any region to the National IVAW convention last summer, and

they just helped found the 10th Midwest chapter in Columbus, Ohio, the largest number of chapters in any of the IVAW regions. The Midwest sent members to put forward their position on the war to both the Democratic and the Republican conventions last summer, and they continue to speak at high schools and colleges to let students know the real truth about life in the military.

The San Diego chapters of Vietnam Veterans Against the War and Veterans For Peace with the support of IVAW and MFSO have made a commitment to support war resister Robin Long while he is serving time in the Naval Brig in San Diego. Robin is the first Active Duty GI Iraq War Resister to flee to Canada and seek political asylum, rather than deploy to Iraq. In spite of the Canadian people's support for US war resisters, the conservative government of Stephen Harper extradited Robin to the US for prosecution

VVAW member Jan A. Ruhman, a former marine who is both the Southern California contact for Vietnam Veterans Against the War and the vice president of his Veterans For Peace chapter, volunteered with five other veterans and one MFSO member to take turns visiting Robin every weekend and holiday. They are also looking for ways to publicize Robin's case in the hope that he might be granted a pardon. They are planning candlelight vigils at the front gate of the base during the Christmas season.

Baltimore VVAW was just one of a number cities in which VVAW members participated in support actions for IVAW's local *Winter Soldier: Afghanistan and Iraq* events. Like the national event in March, soldiers testify about the reality of Iraq and Afghanistan. VVAW contact Jim Baldrige served on security for the local event. He reports that Baltimore is about to become a formal VVAW chapter.

In closing I want to express my very great appreciation for all that your generosity has made possible. I am very proud of all the exciting things that Vietnam Veterans Against the War is doing, and I am very aware that most of them would have been impossible without your financial support. If you can make another tax-deductible donation to Vietnam Veterans Against the War now at the end of this momentous year, you can help insure that we will continue to be a successful part of the struggle for veterans, for peace and for justice.

Wishing you all the best over the holidays,



Barry Romo
National Coordinator

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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