



# VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

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Dear Vietnam Veterans Against the War supporter:

As always, I want to tell you how much I appreciate your support of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Your financial contributions have enabled us to enlarge the scope of our opposition to the Iraq war--far beyond anything we hoped for even a year ago.

With your help, we are supporting Iraq Veterans Against the War's: *Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan*. This month Iraq veterans from all over the US will gather in Washington, DC to testify about what is really going on in Iraq and Afghanistan. The event is modeled on Vietnam Veterans Against the War's 1971 Winter Soldier Investigation where veterans testified about war crimes they had witnessed or committed in Vietnam. (During the Revolutionary War, Thomas Paine contrasted the Sunshine Patriots with the Winter Soldiers, who carry on even in the hardest times.)

Vietnam Veterans Against the War is providing major financial and logistical support. Thanks to your donations, we are able to charter a bus to bring Iraq veterans to DC from the Midwest. We have also volunteered to coordinate travel, housing and security. The security is particularly intense because the right wing "Gathering of Eagles," are planning a counter-demonstration. It is our role to make sure they do not get into the event and disrupt it—a serious possibility since, only last week, we saw them shout down Iraq Veterans Against the War speakers in Joliet, Illinois. VVAW is providing leadership, equipment, training, and the bulk of the approximately 70 security folks at Winter Soldier.

It is because of you that Vietnam Veterans Against the War is able to buy walkie-talkies for the security volunteers and to subsidize their housing and transportation if they are unable to pay their own way. In addition, you have made it possible for us to offer Iraq Veterans Against the War a significant cash contribution toward the expenses of the event.

We are putting so many resources into Winter Soldier because we see it as having the potential to transform the debate about the war. Lately the press has been echoing the Bush Administration line about the success of the "surge" and the reduction of US deaths. War crimes in places like Haditha, Fallujah and Abu Ghraib are portrayed as the actions of "a few bad apples." Instead IVAW will focus the blame where it truly belongs--on official military policies that are destroying Iraq and Afghanistan.

**We have now been co-sponsors of the Different Drummer Café outside Ft. Drum in New York for three months. We continue to be very excited about this opportunity to deepen our participation in the organizing of active duty soldiers.**

In January, the Ft. Drum chapter of Iraq Veterans Against the War held a special fundraiser for Winter Soldier at the Cafe. There was a panel of Iraq veterans and several bands providing entertainment.

Tod Ensign, a lawyer with our partner organization at the Café, Citizen Soldier, has filed a lawsuit on behalf of the Ft. Drum soldiers. The local Veterans Administration had been forbidden to help

veterans and GI's with the paperwork for their applications for disability benefits in complete violation of the law. Apparently the always frugal Bush administration decided that too many Ft. Drum soldiers were successfully applying for the disability benefits to which they were entitled. The Café is also supporting the IVAW chapter in organizing soldiers to protest the VA policy by filing an Article 135 complaint. Article 135 is a provision of the Universal Code of Military Justice that allows soldiers to file a grievance while forbidding the soldiers' superiors from retaliating. Needless to say, the soldiers who have courageously signed are taking a substantial risk that the freedom from retaliation may not really be effective in practice.

On March 11, a press conference was held at the Different Drummer about Brian C, a wounded Afghanistan vet who was ordered to deploy to Iraq against the judgement of his doctors. He has filed a request for a court inquiry into the treatment of wounded soldiers by the general who ignored the Do Not Deploy order in his medical chart.

The Café has been unable to hire our ideal candidate, who would have been a recent combat veteran and a trained organizer, but we have made an interim hire of a young woman who is married to a Ft. Drum soldier. Cara will manage the Café and receive training from an experienced organizing trainer on a 90 day trial basis. We are impressed with Cara's competence and openness to learning new skills.

Cara and the Café will be supporting the Ft. Drum IVAW on May 17, Armed Forces Day. Peace Activists from five cities in upper New York state will march to Watertown, the town outside Ft. Drum where the Café is located. The activists will join IVAW and soldiers from the base in an outdoor event with music and speeches. We hope that the day will provide an opportunity for the IVAW chapter to reach out to many more base soldiers.

Your donations continue to make it possible for Vietnam Veterans Against the War to employ Ray Parrish, our military counselor. Ray continues to receive calls and emails from veterans, GIs, and military family members all over the country. A number of calls are from victims of fraudulent enlistment practices.

Ray was contacted by Emily, who called for her Romanian husband Alex because he didn't speak English, even though he was in the Army and in the process of completing Advanced Infantry Training (details of the story have been changed to protect his identity). Alex and Emily had left their children in Romania while they came to the US to build a better life for the family. Alex was a veteran of the Romanian Army, so joining the US Army seemed to be a logical way to use his skills.

Recruiters told him that the Army would provide English language training, that his wife would be taken care of, and that he wouldn't be sent to Iraq. These promises were all false. His unit was set to deploy to Iraq in six months. Alex didn't receive any pay for four months, which left his wife destitute. Their car was repossessed. He got through basic training by imitating the other recruits. When he had a written test, his sergeant stood behind him and pointed to the correct answers. That was also what his recruiter had done.

He received no English training and he could not access medical care for a painful condition because no one on the post spoke Romanian. His situation was no better in the advanced training. At that point, Alex just wanted out. He noted that, if he was deployed without being able to understand his orders, he would endanger the other troops

Ray talked to Alex through Emily and arranged for them to contact the Congressional Representative where Emily lived. With an inquiry from a Congressional Office sent to Alex's Army post, the fraudulent actions of the recruiters will be exposed, and Alex will receive a discharge.

Another call to Ray came from Carl, a member of the Individual Ready Reserve. The IRR is a status for all troops who have left the army until eight full years after their enlistment. Carl thought he was a civilian again, but he received a letter recalling him to active duty. He was very afraid of being sent back to Iraq, especially because he had come to think the war was wrong.

His local Army reserve suggested that he join their unit. They weren't scheduled to deploy to Iraq in the next two years, and all he would have to do was attend monthly drills. When he called Ray he discovered that he would have been administratively discharged from the IRR (with no effects on VA benefits) if he had simply failed to report for his initial IRR activation orders

Soon Carl found out that the unit he had just joined was due to deploy in a few months. He had been conned. He talked to Ray and about his options. Should he go AWOL? Should he apply for Conscientious Objector status? Ray discussed with him the possible consequences of going AWOL, but urged him to follow his own conscience.

Carl did some soul-searching and decided that his conscience was telling him that he needed to fight this. He could go AWOL as a last resort, but he would use his participation in the reserves as an opportunity to organize against the war. He saw himself as being like "an undercover agent of the peace movement."

He began to bring information about the GI Rights Hotline and about Iraq Veterans Against the War to his reserve meetings. Perhaps he would be enough of "a pain in the brass" that they would want to get rid of him. As of this writing, the reserve leadership has recognized Carl's stance by assigning him to office duty during drills where he is being asked to make sure there are actually 500 sheets of paper in each ream. Carl is planning to go to *Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan* and to testify. He hopes that will push the Army into discharging him. Otherwise, going AWOL remains an option.

Ray is also resuming his cable television program Veterans Helping Veterans after a break during the first months of 2008. His next program in this second series will be about Winter Soldier and about US war resisters trying to stay in Canada.

In Chicago, the Iraq Veterans Against the War chapter has grown tremendously, in part thanks to your contributions, which have enabled Vietnam Veterans Against the War to provide matching funds for their office and staff person. The chapter now has over 30 members, and is one of the largest chapters in the organization.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War members are active around the country. They have held fundraisers for Winter Soldier in many cities, including San Diego, Washington, DC, Milwaukee, Marietta, Ohio, and in Texas. Our Oklahoma contact, bluesman Watermelon Slim, has made a major individual contribution to help get Texas and Oklahoma Iraq vets to Washington.

Jan Ruhman of San Diego served in the California regional office of Vietnam Veterans Against the War back in the day. Jan got active again last November when he was outraged by nearby Long Beach, California's refusing to let anti-war veterans march in the Veterans Day parade. He was instrumental in putting pressure on the Long Beach City Council and served as the spokesperson in meetings with the City Council and the Parade Committee.

Just this month, the Parade Committee, made up of members of mainstream and right wing veterans' groups, agreed to allow anti-war veterans to march next year. Jan wore his VVAW button to the meeting and was pleasantly surprised to find that about half of this very conservative Parade Committee also opposed the war. Jan has also organized an informal VVAW chapter in Long Beach.

Bill Perry, Philadelphia Vietnam Veterans Against the War contact played a major support role for Philadelphia IVAW chapter's 25-mile, two-day march from Constitution Square in Philadelphia to Valley Forge. It was at Valley Forge during the Revolutionary War that soldiers heard Thomas Paine's lines about Winter Soldiers read out loud while camped for the winter. Perry obtained the permits for the rallies and campsite, scouted and timed the route, and accompanied the march. He reports that the IVAW members were truly Winter Soldiers—the temperature at the campsite was in the low 20s. The march was covered by Philadelphia television and in the Philadelphia Daily News.

Your generous financial support has enabled Vietnam Veterans Against the War to come back from times in the 1990's when the leadership had to reach into their own pockets to print the newspaper. Thanks to you, we are able to play a much enlarged role in the anti-war movement, offering military counseling, participating in ongoing counter recruiting, providing major support for Iraq Veterans Against the War, co-sponsoring the Different Drummer Cafe, receiving ongoing media exposure, and providing security and logistic support for Winter Soldier. We know that you cannot make a donation every time we send you one of these updates, but, if you are able to do so at this time, we will use it frugally and strategically to press for an end to the war and for decent benefits for all veterans.

Sincerely,



Barry Romo  
National Coordinator



*IVAW member Patty McCann at VVAW Veterans Day Event, Chicago 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 [vva.org](http://vva.org).

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