



VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

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Dear Supporter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War,

I am very excited to write to you about our newest venture. We are beginning a new level of cooperation with Iraq Veterans Against the War. Early this summer they asked us to support their field organizing. Thanks to your generosity, we are able to respond to their request. We are contributing start-up money for the new program that will organize new active-duty members and chapters, and support and offer organizing training to existing IVAW chapters.

Iraq Veterans Against the War are building on a history of successful field organizing. For example, last summer IVAW members and staff did a tour of twelve military bases. At Fort Bragg in North Carolina, Cody, a soldier who liked the military but opposed the Iraq War, attended an event put on by the tour. Cody talked to IVAW member and Fellow Fort Bragg soldier Kyle Hanson, and ended up spending two full days hanging out with Kyle and the visiting IVAW members. IVAW's message was simple. "You are not alone." Now Kyle is the president and Cody a member of a brand new active duty Fort Bragg Iraq Veterans Against the War Chapter!

As I write this, Iraq Veterans Against the War is beginning a six-week planning process that will determine the shape of the new field organizing program. I look forward to writing to you again in December to tell you the details of the program and its strategy.

We have made this organizing program a priority because we at Vietnam Veterans Against the War believe that active duty organizing is a critical component of the anti-war movement. We also believe that Iraq Veterans Against the War is more effective than any other organization in mobilizing anti-war soldiers and recent veterans.

I cannot tell you how much I appreciate your support of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. You have enabled us to be a significant force in the anti-war movement. Only because of you can we support IVAW's field organizing, pay our now full-time military counselor, and coordinate the efforts of our dedicated members around the country.

Our military counselor, Ray Parrish, continues to help veterans, GIs and family members. Ray had worked with Richard, an active duty soldier, some months ago on his application for Conscientious Objector status. Richard (not his real name) has not yet received a response from the military. Just last week, Richard received a notice to report for duty at his base. Immediately, he went AWOL because he is determined not to go back to Iraq. Because of your financial support, Ray can be there for Richard at this difficult time, offering both advice and emotional support.

In addition to counseling individuals, Ray is making a major effort to train others in military counseling, because he knows that he alone can never begin to meet the need. He gives seminars to lawyers working with the Legal Assistance Foundation, trains lawyers at John Marshall Law School, and leads workshops on military counseling at events like the Veterans For Peace and the GI Rights Hotline Conferences.

Ray knows important but frequently overlooked options for veterans. For example, many mainstream counselors and lawyers don't know that the VA can, in many circumstances, offer medical and psychological treatment to a veteran with a bad conduct discharge, as long as the veteran's military record shows evidence of psychological problems that prevented the veteran from "serving honorably."

Ray also encourages mainstream counselors to go the extra mile as he did recently when he went to the VA hospital with a veteran whose psychological report had not arrived at the appropriate agency. For three hours Ray and the veteran walked through the hospital to track the report down, only to find that it was on his doctor's desk. The doctor thought that it would be no problem to wait until she saw the veteran again in two months! Needless to say, Ray lit a fire under the doctor and the report got out.

I am so proud of Carol Trainer, her husband Harold Trainer, and the other members of the Kentuckiana Chapter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War for their intensive efforts on the behalf of war resister James Burmeister. Burmeister went AWOL because his attempts to protest the military's tactic of putting out weapons, or in the case of Burmeister's unit, a surveillance camera mounted on a pole, as bait. Anyone who picked up the weapons or examined the surveillance camera were presumed to be insurgents and shot by sniper teams. The *Washington Post* reported on this tactic in 2007.

Burmeister could not, in good conscience, continue to provide cover for his "small kill team" because innocent civilians were picking up the "bait" and getting killed.

Burmeister suffers from PTSD and possible Traumatic Brain Injury. He went to Canada, where he spoke to the media to expose the "small kill" program. Eventually, he turned himself in at Fort Knox in Kentucky, where he was charged with desertion and court-martialed.

Carol, our Louisville Vietnam Veterans Against the War contact, raised almost \$800 to enable Burmeister's parents to stay near the base so that they could visit their son. She mobilized letters and emails to the base commander calling for the military to discharge Burmeister without jail time. She reached out to the media. Burmeister's case was covered at least twice by the main Louisville newspaper, by a Louisville TV station, and by media in Burmeister's home state of Oregon, as well as by numerous bloggers and web sites. Carol and her husband were also interviewed by media about the case.

In the end, the desertion charge was dropped and Burmeister pleaded guilty to a lesser charge of being AWOL. He was sentenced to six months. He was given a bad conduct discharge that will prevent him from receiving medical care from the VA for his physical and psychological injuries. We hope that Ray can help him get his discharge upgraded, but his

treatment will certainly be delayed at best.

Many other “deserters” at Fort Knox have received bad discharges without jail time. Burmeister’s supporters suspect that the Army had it in for him because of his whistle blowing regarding the military’s classified “baiting” program.

Although Burmeister’s sentence was a great injustice, I am personally convinced that if it were not for Carol and others’ campaign in support of Burmeister, he would have received an even longer jail term. I am so grateful for the efforts of Carol, the Kentuckiana VVAW chapter, and Ray Parrish, who was also intensively involved.

Every chance I get, I try to go to hear our Oklahoma VVAW contact Bill Homans, aka Watermelon Slim perform with his blues band, Watermelon Slim and the Workers. After headlining the Cincinnati Blues Festival last August, Slim went on to Parkersburg, West Virginia, where Vietnam Veterans Against the War sponsored a benefit for IVAW. Slim was the main attraction at the benefit, and he donated all his proceeds.

Southeastern Ohio Vietnam Veterans Against the War contact Bill Reynolds began the evening by welcoming the crowd. During a break in the music, VVAW National Coordinator Marty Webster spoke to the overflow audience and gave a brief history of VVAW and our relationship with IVAW.

Marty also discussed the ineffectiveness of the VA and our government’s failure to address the physical, psychological and material needs of returning veterans and active duty GIs. He then introduced an IVAW member from Cincinnati, USAF Veteran Lt. Harvey Tharpi, who suffers gravely from the effects of PTSD. Harvey joined Marty on the stage and described his experience of inadequate treatment by the Air Force and the VA. There was a standing ovation when Harvey had finished.

From coast to coast and in between, VVAW members go to classes and community events to counter the false picture of war and the drumbeat of half-true promises by military recruiters. The most rewarding part of my work for Vietnam Veterans Against the War is talking to high school students. I go home thinking, today I kept at least one kid from going through what I went through in Vietnam.

In California, Steve Crandall is called by local high school students who ask for interviews about his service in Vietnam. VVAW members Jim Murphy and Dayl Wise continue their amazing outreach to New York City high school students. This year they have already lined up 12 high school speaking gigs for the month of November alone. Sometimes they debate military recruiters. Needless to say, the recruiters get the short end.

They are starting a film series at public libraries and other community venues where they show such films as *Winter Soldier*, the 1971 VVAW testimonies about atrocities we witnessed and committed in Vietnam. Dayl is particularly involved in public readings of poetry by anti-war veterans from World War II all the way up to Iraq.

Jim speaks for all of us who have painful memories of war when he says, “These speaking

events bring up stuff you don't really want to bring up. But we do it because of the need." Sometimes Jim lightens the mood at a high school class by describing the military rations he ate in Vietnam and tells the students how great their school lunch is by comparison. This always gets a laugh and a fun argument.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War had to make a difficult decision this summer. When IVAW approached us about funding their field organizing, we realized that we did not have the resources to support both their request and to support our involvement in the Different Drummer Café at Fort Drum.

We chose the IVAW program first of all because of IVAW's unique capacity to organize soldiers and veterans. Also, at the Drummer, we realized that much of our financial contribution went to renting and maintaining the space itself. The IVAW proposal offered us the opportunity to put 100% of our contribution into organizing, as well as the opportunity to organize over a broader geographical area.

Although we decided the IVAW organizing was a higher priority, we regard the Different Drummer as an excellent project. It continues under the sole sponsorship of Citizen Soldier, www.citizensoldier.org.

Again, I cannot tell you how much your financial support means for Vietnam Veterans Against the War's efforts to make anti-war veteran's voices heard.

I know that you cannot make a contribution every time you receive an update on our activities, but if you are able to make a tax-deductible contribution at this time, you will make it possible for us to increase our capacity to oppose the war and support veterans' right to decent benefits. Without you, Vietnam Veterans Against the War would not be the growing, vibrant, and effective organization that it is today.

Sincerely,



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 vvaw.org.

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