



VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

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Dear fellow activist:

I am so grateful for your financial support of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Thanks to your generosity, VVAW has been able to:

- Continue to employ Military Counselor Ray Parrish, who has helped so many veterans and GIs,
- Hire Johanna (Hans) Buwalda, a licensed counselor who, among many other activities, traveled immediately to Ft. Hood after the shootings to provide independent mental health services and referrals that would not otherwise have been available to the traumatized troops,
- Provide seed money for Iraq Veterans Against the War's new Field Organizing Program that organizes active duty troops and veterans in opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, campaigns for adequate mental health and other benefits, and teaches leadership skills to prepare Iraq and Afghanistan vets for the long struggle ahead,
- Offer moral and financial support to war resister Robin Long in California,
- Hold "Standdowns" where homeless veterans receive food, medical care, and basic supplies,
- Support the efforts of Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange to receive compensation for the illnesses caused by US use of that defoliant during the Vietnam War.

In my last update, I told you how your donations have enabled Vietnam Veterans Against the War to play a major role in getting Iraq Veterans Against the War's new Field Organizing Program off the ground. I am pleased to be able to report that the organizing program is fully up and running.

To cite just a few of the accomplishments of the IVAW chapters, many of them supported by the Field Organizing Program:

- IVAW has obtained an appointment for its DC chapter members to meet with the US State Department. They will point out that belonging to a labor union is *illegal* in Iraq under the current Iraqi Constitution, which has kept this part of Sadaam Hussein's labor laws. The US had great influence on the Constitution when it was drafted, and, if the State Department wanted to, it could have great influence in sweeping away this

relic of the administrations of Sadaam and George W. Bush.

- Madison Iraq Veterans Against the War mounted a sharp protest when the escalation of the war in Afghanistan was announced.
- The Seattle IVAW chapter responded to the announcement of the escalation with "Operation First Casualty," so-called because the first casualty of war is truth. On the streets of the city, the chapter enacted scenes from their wartime service: civilians (played by IVAW supporters) were grabbed on the street, thrown down roughly, threatened with death and zip-tied with plastic handcuffs. Civilian houses were broken into and searched with the males arrested and taken away, etc. The purpose is to enable ordinary Americans on the streets to see what our soldiers are actually doing in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I mentioned in my last update that Aaron had been working to develop the leadership skills of the individuals in the Ft. Hood IVAW chapter. As you can imagine, his support was badly needed in the aftermath of the shootings there in early November. Aaron helped them deal with their shock and trauma by inviting Hans Buwalda, one of Vietnam Veterans Against the War's military counselors, to come down and help chapter members and other soldiers deal with what they had just gone through.

Aaron helped the Ft. Hood chapter to pull together and offer an effective response. He worked with them on how to talk to the media, which enabled IVAW's message to be spread widely. Ft. Hood IVAW received coverage on "Nightline," in the *New York Times*, and on local television, among other outlets. Aaron helped the chapter organize a candlelight vigil in memory of the victims of the shootings. You can see a video of the vigil and listen to Ft. Hood IVAW leader Mike Kern by going to www.ivaw.org.

I am incredibly proud of Hans' role in supporting soldiers at Ft. Hood after the shootings. Without your financial support, Vietnam Veterans Against the War could not have afforded to employ Hans. In any other circumstance, she would have been very unlikely to be able to pick up and respond on a moment's notice. Iraq Veterans Against the War asked her to come because they knew that some members of their chapter and many other troops would be deeply traumatized. Sending Hans to Fort Hood was truly a collaborative effort and I am grateful to the Ft. Lewis chapter of IVAW for raising money for her transportation.

Hans accompanied IVAW members twice and went on base to visit troops who had just made suicide attempts. She talked to a soldier whose best buddy had been shot and to others who had friends injured. She provided many hours of counseling to soldiers and veterans who frequented the Under the Hood Coffee House in the town near the base. Active duty soldiers told Hans that they would like more counseling, something that was not readily available at Ft Hood. In their experience, mental health services at Ft Hood involved mostly prescribing medication. They also told her that they didn't think they could trust civilian counselors in towns surrounding towns "because everybody is connected to the military."

However, Hans was concerned that the need for counseling was great and that obviously she had to return to Chicago. Therefore, she saw her most important task as doing something to connect soldiers with civilian counselors to help them deal with their PTSD from the shootings and from their experiences while deployed.

She carefully screened dozens of local counselors by phone and was able to get the soldiers connected to counselors who were supportive of anti-war soldiers and wouldn't see their prime task as getting their clients ready for the next deployment. She developed a substantial referral list that she hopes others can continue to expand.

Hans gave a well-attended workshop at Under the Hood. Even more important, she made herself available for informal conversations with the soldiers and veterans who came to the café. In a conversation about PTSD, she was amazed and rather appalled to discover that no mental health provider on base had given the troops the most minimal education about PTSD. For example, the idea that many of the problems they were experiencing were normal reactions to an abnormal situation (war), was new to them.

Her work was not done when she came home to Chicago. She continues to stay in touch with the soldiers she spoke with at Ft. Hood to make sure they actually get connected to the counselors who offered to provide treatment. She will be working with another soldier who is due to come back to Illinois in the next month to make sure he gets the VA benefits to which he is entitled and to make sure that he continues treatment in Chicago. In addition, people at Under the Hood Coffee House are regularly consulting with her via telephone, e-mail, and Facebook.

Ray Parrish, Vietnam Veterans Against the War's longtime military counselor, did not go to Ft. Hood himself, but his life and work were very much affected by the shootings. One of the victims was a counselor and anti-war Vietnam vet he had known and admired for years. John first contacted Ray in 2004 when he was out of the Army working in the VA. He found Ray on the internet and wanted to ask his help in getting one of his clients a discharge upgrade. They worked together on this case and on others in the next two years.

John became frustrated with all the obstacles he was encountering in trying to help veterans in his job as a civilian veterans counselor. He began to think that he could help soldiers so much more if he rejoined the military and was assigned to a unit that was actually deployed so that he could offer immediate treatment. Needless to say this was a very difficult decision for an anti-war vet who was an active member of his Veterans For Peace chapter. Ray listened to him and talked to him as he struggled with this decision.

He began to study to become a psychiatric nurse so that he would have the credentials to serve soldiers on deployment. He did rejoin the military and was about to be deployed to Afghanistan with his unit when he was killed.

The killing of one therapist by another therapist at Ft. Hood made Ray deepen his commitment to supporting not only veterans but those who counsel veterans. He has now started to make himself available every Monday night for any veterans'

counselor who wants to drop in to share his or her personal stress that results from doing this work.

I am also amazed and proud of our Vietnam Veterans Against the War members. In a small sampling of what they have done over the year, Florida VVAW activist Tom Baxter gave a talk about the war at the Florida Federation of Labor, and promoted a "send a card to a war resister" program. Aaron Davis, our Salt Lake City contact answers the phones for the GI Rights Hotline and reports that he and his fellow hot-line volunteers have helped thousands of soldiers and veterans.

Horace Coleman spoke and tabled at a Peace Festival held at Cal State University, Long Beach and participated in a Memorial at Sea held in remembrance of Iraq /Afghanistan American troop KIAs. Texas VVAW members offered practical and financial help to "Under the Hood," the GI Coffee House near Ft. Hood.

VVAW founder Jan Barry and Jim Miller spoke on a panel at a film showing of "Leave No Soldier" in Ithaca, NY. Jim also participated in a candle light vigil in remembrance of dead civilians and soldiers. Kentucky VVAW members responded to a call from Ray Parrish to support and help an AWOL soldier who wanted to turn himself in at the nearby Ft. Meade.

Milwaukee, San Diego, Chicago, and Atlanta VVAW participated in Veterans Day activities. Mike Burke of Atlanta has become active in the founding in Atlanta of Veterans for Truth in Recruiting. Jan A. Ruhman has been working on the issue of green card veterans being deported if they get caught in the most minor offences, like a DUI. I urge you to support his efforts. Just email him at jan.ruhman@vetspeak.org, and he will send back material so you can write to Congress and the Whitehouse.

I hope you feel gratified to read about all the work that your contributions have made possible. I know some of you have lost jobs and cannot possibly make an additional donation at this time. But one of our donors wrote me a note saying, "I am trying to donate a little more this year because I know there are so many other people who aren't able to support Vietnam Veterans Against the War even though they want to." If you are able to, please make a generous tax-deductible contribution at this time.

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 for decent benefits for all veterans. Checks to VVAW are tax deductible. You can also donate online at vvaaw.org.

Name (print) _____
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E-Mail Address (please print clearly) _____