



VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

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Dear Supporter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War,

Thank you so very much for the support you have given to Vietnam Veterans Against the War. You have made it possible for us to

- oppose the war,
- support veterans and war resisters, and to
- help finance Iraq Veterans Against the War's organizing among active duty soldiers.

We are so proud of what we have been able to accomplish and so very grateful to you for providing the financial base that has made these accomplishments possible.

I recently had the great privilege of attending Iraq Veterans Against the War's first organizing skills training workshop for active duty soldiers. It was held in Washington State near Ft. Lewis. I was invited to talk to these courageous young men and women about the GI organizing that we in Vietnam Veterans Against the War had done in the 70s.

The workshop was conceived by one active duty IVAW member who was very aware that, although IVAW has some active duty chapters, there are a number of active duty members who are isolated and don't know other IVAW members. A workshop could both bring soldiers together and could also give them real skills for reaching out to their fellow soldiers. Because there is some overlap in the skills needed to organize in a civilian work place and in the military, labor organizers facilitated some of the sessions and taught participants how to evaluate the environment in which they are trying to organize, how to reach out, and how to work for consensus among a group of soldiers.

Because of you, Vietnam Veterans Against the War was able to offer funding for the entire workshop.

I'd like to share with you the story of one soldier I met at the workshop. Joan is a young woman who has been a marine for five years and now is in the Individual Ready Reserve, which means that she could be called up at any time. She has had no previous experience in doing activist work, and she had only been in IVAW for a few months. However, she turned out to be a natural leader. Her quick grasp of campaign strategy and tactics made us all think she had been doing this kind of work for years.

She told us that her previous experience of trainings led her to expect a "death by powerpoint" presentation. However she said, "I left Seattle with a renewed focus, great ideas, tools to help me reach my goals, and a set of new friends." Joan now goes home to take leadership in her IVAW chapter whose previous leaders have all moved away. She

is equipped to share what she learned with others so that together they can begin to do successful outreach to soldiers at the nearby base.

After the Ft. Lewis workshop, Marty Webster, another VVAW National Coordinator, and I went on a tour of the west coast. We did media interviews and met with VVAW members and other veterans up and down the state of California. We were happy that some veterans who had been active members of VVAW during Vietnam joined up again.

The most memorable part of the trip was a visit to war resister Robin Long who is serving time at the Navy brig near San Diego. Marty and I were able to join San Diego VVAW contact Jan A. Ruhman and Robin's mother on a visit to Robin in the jail. Jan and the San Diego veterans have been donating money to help Robin support his child and the child's mother who remain in Canada. We know that Canada will be deporting more war resisters and that we have to be available to continue to offer moral and financial support.

Our military counselor, Ray Parrish, continues to support veterans and GIs. Recently, Ray has received several phone calls from Larry who was detained by local police when they did a traffic stop of a car in which he was a passenger. The police checked their data base and found that he had been AWOL for two years. Larry was put in the county jail; his family was not permitted to visit him; and then the police turned him over to the Army.

All this started when Larry was trying to get treatment for his PTSD resulting from his deployment in Iraq. When he requested help, he was given an appointment three months in the future. Desperate, Larry took off on an initial AWOL and went to see his family doctor at home. The doctor gave him a statement documenting his PTSD and urged Larry to turn himself in and ask for a medical discharge.

Larry went back to his unit, but his situation only worsened. He still was not given a timely appointment for mental health evaluation and he now had to deal with charges for going AWOL. Disgusted, Larry left again and went underground for two years until he was picked up in the traffic stop.

In his phone calls with Larry, Ray offered support and told Larry to insist on a medical discharge for PTSD. Larry should go to trial for AWOL if necessary rather than accept a plea bargain for an Other Than Honorable discharge. If Larry agrees to a plea bargain, he will be further than ever away from getting treatment for his PTSD because he will be denied VA mental health benefits. He would also be denied any compensation if his PTSD proves to be a long-term disability. Currently Ray is waiting for Larry to call and let him know what has happened.

It is thanks to your financial support to Vietnam Veterans Against the War that Ray can be available to veterans and GIs on a full-time basis. Ray also continues to host his regular cable TV program, Vets Helping Vets, which now has a year round broadcast slot.

All over the country, Vietnam Veterans Against the War members joined anti-war events taking place around the 6th anniversary of the war in Iraq. Kentuckiana VVAW participated in a commemoration of the 6th anniversary of the Iraq war held on the courthouse steps

in Louisville. Rockford, Illinois contact Stan Campbell spoke at an vigil outside the office of their Congressional Representative, who is a strong supporter of the war. Chicago VVAW marched in an anti-war, pro immigrant rights march held in a Latino neighborhood.

San Diego VVAW marched in the local anti-war march, and San Diego contact Jan A. Ruhman spoke at the rally at the end. VVAW member Frank Gage of Buffalo participated in an anti-war car caravan on the 6th anniversary. VVAW joined with members of other anti-war veterans groups to lead the Atlanta anti-war march. Sandy Fulton, a career Naval officer who resigned in 1968 to protest the Vietnam War was asked to read some of her poems at a vigil on March 19th in Philadelphia. Milwaukee VVAW joined Veterans For Peace and Iraq Veterans Against the War in leading a march from the courthouse that called for an end to the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan and for funding human needs. Ken Ashe toured Asheville, North Carolina on his flatbed truck with signs and banners protesting the war.

Horace Coleman participated in a mock funeral procession for the 6th anniversary through Seal Beach and Long Beach, California. There were Mock coffins and an effigy of a wounded troop. Cars in the procession were decorated with "funeral stickers." The procession stopped at a Long Beach cemetery for speeches and a reading by Horace of some of his poetry. Press coverage included a photograph in the *Long Beach Press-Telegram* and stories in the *Orange County Register* and the *LA Times*.

We were outraged at the recent US Supreme Court decision to deny any compensation for Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange, the chemical defoliant the US used in Vietnam. Our Nevada contact, Rena Kopystenski has been invited to go to Paris to testify at the International Tribunal of Conscience about the effects of Agent Orange. Last year, after years of illness, her husband died as a result of his exposure to Agent Orange while he served in Vietnam. In her testimony, Rena will emphasize that, horrendous as Agent Orange illnesses have been for Vietnam veterans, the effects on the Vietnamese people have been a thousand times worse.

The Kentuckiana Chapter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War has been invited to join a coalition called "Silence over Thunder." "Silence" opposes the military air show at the Kentucky Derby Festival coming up in April. The air show with military planes thundering overhead is used as a military recruiting event. VVAW will join the coalition in a two-hour procession around the Great Lawn where people watch the air show. They will help pass out counter-recruiting flyers and participate in the "Peaceful Skies" picnic the coalition puts on as a family event without the militarism.

Horace Coleman, mentioned above, has been doing counter-recruiting for years. He recently spoke at an assembly in an inner city Los Angeles high school following an anti-war film. Horace also is providing regular commentary at www.vvaw.org.

Bill Reynolds of Marietta, Ohio lives in a small and conservative farm community. He has teamed up with local peace activists on counter-recruiting. It is the law that, if recruiters are allowed into a high school, the school must also allow an alternative point of view. Bill and friends have contacts in the school who tell them when the recruiters are scheduled.

Bill will then call up and remind the school that it is their right to have a table the same day. Sometimes the counter-recruiters and the military recruiters have tables right across from each other outside the school cafeteria. Sometimes the recruiters don't show up. Bill thinks that this tactic has resulted in the recruiters pretty much staying out of the high schools and just recruiting from their offices.

Bill and his friends have also "infiltrated" a support group for military families. They attended a meeting, told them who they were, explained that they weren't there to preach anti-war propaganda, but that they would like to help. They have initiated programs for the families on topics such as benefits available to military families and PTSD.

It is very gratifying to me that, after so many years, our members continue to serve on the front lines of the anti-war movement.

In closing, I want to say again how much we appreciate your support. The financial contributions of you and people like you have enabled us to become an increasingly effective part of the movements for peace and for the rights of veterans and GIs. I know that you cannot contribute every time I send you an update, but, if you are able to write a tax deductible check this time, you will be making a difference in our ability to carry out the goals we all share.

Sincerely,



Barry Romo
National Coordinator



Barry Romo and Marty Webster on VVAW West Coast Tour.

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.

Name (print) _____
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