



VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

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Dear fellow activist,

Every time I write an update, I am freshly reminded how much we owe to you for your support of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Thank you so much! If you recently sent in a donation, we don't mean to pester you. Just check out this report about what we are doing with your money.

If you haven't contributed recently, we would love to have your further financial support at this time. You can help us offer military counseling in an anti-war environment, support Iraq Veterans Against the War, fight for compensation for Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange, oppose the deportation of immigrant veterans for minor offenses, help homeless veterans, and oppose the costly and counter-productive wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Every dollar you contribute helps to continue this work.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War has launched a new program to mobilize our at-large members to become active in anti-war activities. We have many members who are not in VVAW chapters. It can be hard for them to connect with the programs of the organization.

What we are doing is making personal contact with our at-large members by phone and asking them to get involved with whatever activity suits their skills and interests. For example, going to an anti-war march, writing a letter to the editor, speaking to classes or community groups, supporting war resisters, etc. Those volunteering to do the calls have been excited to get positive responses from our members.

We believe that this program will enable us to make an even greater contribution to the anti-war movement. If you want to help, email Hannah at hf52@aol.com.

Our military and veterans counseling and our support for Iraq Veterans Against the War all came together in our support for active duty soldier Jeff Hanks.

Jeff has served in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Recently, Jeff's parents contacted IVAW and asked for help the day before Jeff was scheduled for an appointment for a military psychological evaluation for PTSD. That evaluation was cancelled by his commander who ordered Jeff to re-deploy the next day instead of going for his appointment.

IVAW got in touch with Hans Buwalda, VVAW's mental health counselor. Hans then contacted Jeff's family. She referred the family to our military counselor, Ray Parrish, because Jeff and his family needed information about Jeff's options and what would be the consequences if he refused deployment. Jeff knew his PTSD was so severe that he was

unfit to deploy. But should he refuse orders? He had 24 hours to decide.

Because of his years of experience helping veterans, Ray was able to tell Jeff's parents that, even in the worst case, if Jeff were to be court-martialed, he would still be able to receive health and disability benefits from the VA. Since Jeff had many awards and commendations, the VA would make a determination that Jeff's "character of service" was honorable and he would therefore have access to VA benefits.

The next day, an hour before Jeff was supposed to report to get on the plane, he called Ray himself. Ray explained the VA's "character of service" policy to Jeff directly and was able to reassure Jeff that, if he decided to go AWOL, a community of support would be there for him. They also discussed Jeff's interest in going public with his case.

As soon as Jeff made the decision to go AWOL, Hans was instrumental in arranging for him to get civilian psychological evaluations because he needed documentation about his PTSD before he could return to his military base.

Hans has developed an extensive network of mental health professionals who are willing to help soldiers and veterans. She screens these providers to make sure she is offering a quality referral. She was able to find Jeff two professionals near where he was staying in North Carolina. Hans coordinated with Courage to Resist, as well as Civilian Medical Resource Network who provided Jeff with an additional evaluation via telephone.

Hans called Jeff every other day. Jeff needed support because he was spending the days all alone while his wife was at work. Hans' work with Jeff was very intensive. She estimates that it required about 80 hours of her time.

It is only because of your financial generosity that Ray and Hans are able to make their extraordinary contributions to the welfare of veterans and active duty soldiers. Thanks to you, Vietnam Veterans Against the War can employ them full time.

Iraq Veterans Against the War also supported Jeff during the time he was AWOL. IVAW Field Organizer Chantelle Bateman, along with IVAW members and IVAW supporters drove back from North Carolina with Jeff. They stood by his side as Jeff gave a press conference outside Ft. Campbell, Kentucky, where Jeff is stationed and walked with him as he went to turn himself in. Hans was on call during this entire day to ensure mental health back-up was available to Jeff, his family, as well as his supporters.

Partly because of you, Iraq Veterans Against the War was able to be there for Jeff. Your support of VVAW has enabled us to make a major contribution that helps make it possible for IVAW to employ Chantelle and the other field organizers.

IVAW arranged for media coverage of Jeff's case, including a segment on CBS News with Katie Couric. The media spotlight appeared to change his superiors' treatment of Jeff. Prior to the media coverage, they treated him with hostility and failed to offer him adequate treatment. After the Katie Couric show, their attitude changed and they agreed to pay for Jeff to see a civilian mental health professional who worked in the town near Ft. Campbell.

Jeff's courageous stand inspired other soldiers in similar positions to come forward. Hans offered referrals for evaluation and treatment. She works with one of them and his family on an ongoing basis.

Lead IAW Field Organizer, Aaron Hughes, tells me about the kind of difference he is able to make because he is able to work full time as an organizer. Some wonderful organizing is going on in Kansas, Arkansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma, places that had no IAW presence at the beginning of this year.

Will Stewart-Starks, a Kansas chapter member has become an extraordinary leader. Will went on a tour of universities in Kansas and Arkansas. He also did some great outreach at Ft. Reilly, passing out flyers about Operation Recovery and GI Rights on base on Veterans Day.

But Will is able to be such an amazing leader because he has Aaron as a mentor. None of what Will has done would have happened had Aaron not invited Will to come to an IAW regional retreat and had Aaron not traveled to Kansas to hang out with Will and ask him what he wanted to do.

Aaron and Will talked about what would be the most effective outreach at Ft. Reilly. When an event Will planned flopped because a key activist didn't show up, Aaron was there to tell Will not to be discouraged, that organizing has its ups and downs. Some days you will be mad and feel like quitting.

West Coast Field Organizer Joe Callan accompanied Ft. Lewis (Washington State) and Portland, Oregon members as they drove together to San Francisco. On Veterans Day they joined with the San Francisco IAW chapter to do outreach and teaching events in that city. One of their events was with an Oakland, California youth group. They spoke to the young people about Operation Recovery and about the consequences of joining the military.

The tour not only succeeded in spreading the message in San Francisco, but also the IAW members who participated developed a deeper understanding of Operation Recovery through the process of having to explain it to others.

Chantelle, Joe, and Aaron might not be available to support and mentor these incredible young activist veterans if it were not for you.

Meanwhile, the older generation continues to oppose the wars and fight for veterans' rights. San Diego and Central Valley, California chapters are active in the campaign to oppose the deportation of legal immigrant veterans who have committed minor crimes, sometimes the result of the PTSD they suffer as a result of their combat experiences.

Fellow National Coordinator Marty Webster and I just got back from New York where we participated in a national meeting of the Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign (VAORRC). The meeting updated us on the plans the Vietnamese have for 2011, which marks the 50th anniversary of dioxins being dumped on Vietnam. We'll let you know more about these plans and what you can do in future updates.

Recently, California contact Horace Coleman supported Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange while they were on a speaking tour in Los Angeles. Mike Burke of Atlanta is very active in educating young people about the real consequences of military enlistment. Many chapters and individuals participate in anti-war ceremonies on Veterans Day.


Our members speak at public events. National Coordinator Ann Hirschman presented at the American Public Health Association in November. She organized and presided over a panel on public health as it relates to veterans and active duty soldiers. Vietnam vet John McElrath, who joined VVAW last year, was invited to speak at an art opening.

St. Louis contact and criminologist David Curry participated in a panel on youth involvement in gangs. He argued that just as kids from low income families find gangs to be one of the few viable options open to them as a way of making a living, so too do kids find the military to be the best of very limited options. They then come out without marketable skills and having been taught poor ways to solve problems.

Chicago VVAW members once again helped out at the Winter Standdown for homeless veterans, which helped thousand of homeless vets. San Diego VVAW raised money to get hooded ponchos and sleeping bags for homeless veterans. San Diego contact Jan Ruhman also regularly opens his home to provide meals and shelter to homeless vets.

We know that you cannot make a donation every time you receive one of my updates, **but if you are able to make a year end contribution at this time, you will be enabling Vietnam Veterans Against the War to continue taking care of veterans and opposing the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.** We have been fighting for Veterans, peace and justice since 1967. You are a vital part of our community.

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) _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

E-Mail Address (please print clearly) _____