



VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

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Dear fellow activist,

I want to thank you for all of your support for Vietnam Veterans Against the War. **Because of you**, we can offer major financial support to Iraq Veterans Against the War, employ a military counselor and a mental health professional—both full-time. Because of you we can fight to end the deportation of veterans of all eras, spread the word about the ongoing needs of Vietnamese and US victims of Agent Orange poisoning, and make sure upcoming generations also learn the lessons of Vietnam.

You may remember from previous updates that Vietnam Veterans Against the War is making a major ongoing financial contribution to the new Field Organizing Program developed by Iraq Veterans Against the War. **I talked to Joe Callan, one of the four field organizers IVAW has been able to hire, thanks in part to your donations.** Joe's mother is Navajo. Before he worked for IVAW, he worked in a youth prevention program in the Native American community.

Joe is most excited about the campaign that IVAW is developing around a "GI Bill of Rights." The draft contains such provisions as

All Service Members and Veterans are equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of fellowship/camaraderie.

Service Members are entitled to and obligated to refuse to serve in combat if they are asked to participate in a war that is carried on without a Congressional Declaration of War.

All service members are entitled to and have a responsibility to refuse orders that will result in collateral damage, the death or wounding of civilians.

All Service Members and Veterans are entitled to education and a decent job when they leave the service If they do not find a job, they are entitled to receive unemployment compensation.

Joe and the other organizers are taking the draft around to IVAW chapters so they can include the ideas of their veteran and active duty members.

IVAW members at one of the new coffee houses near military bases are very excited about the GI Bill of Rights. They plan to attach a small copy to every cup of coffee they give out, so GIs can carry in it in his or her front pocket along with the "rules of engagement"

card provided by the military. That way they can pull it out if they feel their rights are being violated. They also plan to buy a full-page ad in the base paper that will feature the Bill of Rights.

While Joe was visiting them, the IVAW members had just heard about a battalion on the base being put on "lockdown" because a rifle was missing. That meant that no one in the battalion could leave their barracks, not even to go to the mess hall or to the PX. (They did get fed—MREs or sack lunches, Joe supposed.)

Joe and the IVAW members wanted to reach out and offer support to the locked down soldiers, so they made up and delivered encouraging messages and coupons for the coffee house in "goodie bags" containing the kind of snacks the soldiers would be missing.

Joe is working with IVAW members in Arizona to see if they want to become a chapter and making sure they know how to go about it if they should decide they want to. He also visits and works to strengthen existing chapters by helping them prioritize what they need in order to grow. He asks questions like where do you want to be in a year and what do you need to do to accomplish your goals? He will also visit IVAW members near an existing chapter who do not participate in the chapter. He talks to these at-large members about the importance of solidarity and about how we are more powerful together than alone.

Dan is a Vietnam veteran now living in a nursing home with terminal cancer from Agent Orange exposure. He found VVAW's Military Counseling Program on the internet. He had heard from a friend that a veteran's children will receive benefit payments if their parent dies from a service connected problem. But Dan was not eligible because he had received an Other Than Honorable (OTH) discharge. He called Ray and told him about his situation. When Dan mentioned that he was receiving "hospice counseling," Ray got on the bus to visit him the very next day.

Ray talked to Dan and wrote out an informal claim for Dan to sign. Ray turned it in right away so that Dan wouldn't miss the end of the month and be denied a whole month of retroactive benefits. You may remember that I mentioned in the previous update that Ray has been helping many veterans who have been denied services and benefits because they were given OTH discharges because of behavior caused by PTSD.

Ray brought Deedra, one of the volunteers he has been training, to meet Dan and she is taking primary responsibility for Dan's case. She has been helping him with the formal paper work under Ray's supervision.

Hans Buwalda, the mental health counselor who also works for VVAW, wrote up a psychological report showing that Dan's behaviors that resulted in the bad discharge were more likely than not caused by his experiences in Vietnam. Since the behaviors were the result of unrecognized and untreated trauma, there was no "dishonorable service."

Ray and Dan agreed that Dan would benefit greatly if he could be seen by VA doctors who have much more experience with Agent Orange related cancers than the civilian doctors at the nursing home. Fortunately, the VA offers medical services to veterans as soon as they

have started the discharge upgrade process pending the decision as to whether Dan might be qualified because his behaviors were symptoms and not dishonorable service.

Because veterans making claims almost always encounter huge delays, Ray or Deedra will be going by Sen. Dick Durbin's office to ask his staff to intervene with the VA because of the urgency of Dan's medical status.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War can offer this sort of intensive help to veterans that other veteran service organizations would likely turn away. Thanks to your generous contributions, we not only are able to employ Ray but also we have a staff member, Hans, that offers free mental health exams and reports. Ray and Hans are finding that these reports are the key to getting veterans the discharge upgrades that make them eligible for benefits.

Hans has been doing a great many of these reports. But she also sees veterans for psychological counseling, many of them young vets from the current wars. Patrick came to her because he is in a terrible moral dilemma. He was previously deployed to Iraq and is about to deploy to Afghanistan, but he has come to see our military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan as wrong.

On the one hand he wants to apply for CO status, but on the other, he feels responsible for the men under him, many of whom have never deployed before. He could never forgive himself if he did not go with them to Afghanistan and something happened to them. He would feel that he should have been there to protect them. But he would also feel incredibly guilty if he deployed with his men and something happened to them anyway. He would feel that he must have been able to do something.

He knows that soldiers do things under the influence of adrenaline or peer pressure, or just because they are doing their job as soldiers. Then they return to a civilian atmosphere and feel intense regret and guilt. He is trying to prepare his men, so that they don't come home with that burden of guilt. He wants them to understand the war before they go—in a way that he didn't before his first deployment, so he has been showing them educational and anti-war DVDs.

Hans is helping Patrick work through his decision. He knows she will support him no matter what he decides. She also has talked to him about how much he focuses on his men and how little he is focusing on himself. She is working with him to see what he might need to get through the deployment. Music gives him a kind of peace, so Hans is encouraging him to create playlists of music that means something to him for his MP3 player. Together they discovered that asking family and friends to record messages, stories and poetry for him on his MP3 player may be useful later on when he needs to put in his earphones for some alone time to re-charge himself. Of course, Hans will be available to Patrick if he deploys.

In cooperation with Veterans For Peace, Vietnam Veterans Against the War hosted Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange in Los Angeles and Chicago. Vietnamese and Americans joined together to confront Dow Chemical, the maker of Agent Orange, in Los Angeles. Dow was sponsoring a race there.

Although US service members have received some compensation for Agent Orange-related illnesses, Vietnamese victims have not, nor have the children of US service members who have been born with birth defects because of their parent's exposure to the chemical. **When it is presented to Congress, we will support John Conyers's comprehensive bill for compensation for all Agent Orange victims. The war isn't really over until the killing and the maiming stop.** New cancers and babies born with birth defects continue to appear in both the US and Vietnam—even the grand children of those who were exposed and those in Vietnam who continue to be exposed to this very day.

Jan A. Ruhman of San Diego has spearheaded Vietnam Veterans Against the War's opposition to the deportation of Veterans. Through his work, a draft of legislation has been written that designates all those who have served in the US armed forces as US nationals entitled to live in the US. This would include veterans who have already been removed. Both VVAW and Veterans For Peace are supporting this campaign at a national level. You can help by calling or writing your Senators and your Congressional Representatives. There is no bill number to refer to yet, but you can certainly express your outrage that our country is deporting its veterans.

I had written to you about IVAW's campaign to free Marc Hall, the active duty soldier and IVAW member who was put in jail after he wrote an angry rap song about being stop-lossed (he couldn't leave the army when his enlistment should have been up) and complaining about the lack of adequate mental health treatment. VVAW endorsed the campaign and the Chicago chapter helped with a fundraiser for Marc. I am happy to tell you that, shortly after you received my last update, Marc was discharged from the military. He is trying to get his Other Than Honorable discharge upgraded so that he will have access to benefits.

In closing, I want to thank you again for your support of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. I know that you cannot donate every time you receive an update. But if you are in a position to make a tax-deductible contribution again, we will use your donation to continue and strengthen our efforts to support IVAW, provide military counseling in an anti-war context, bring the unfinished business of Agent Orange poisoning to a just conclusion, and to oppose the deportation of veterans.

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) _____