



# VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

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Dear fellow activist,

I always want to begin these updates with a huge "thank you" for your contributions to Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Your financial support has made it possible for us to again become a vital organization that can offer military counseling, support Iraq Veterans Against the War, and mobilize renewed activism among our members all over the country. So, THANK YOU!

Vietnam Veterans Against the War is organizing for an important anti-war anniversary. 40 years ago at **Kent State** the National Guard killed four students at an anti-war rally and wounded many others. Some were crippled for life. This crime went unpunished. Ten days later, police killed two students on the campus of **Jackson State** in Mississippi.

Periodically thereafter, demonstrations, rallies, and remembrances were held at Kent State VVAW participated in most of them. In 1978 I gave a major speech at the rally and had teeth knocked out by the police in an unprovoked attack.

This year, the university and surviving family members are planning a 40th Anniversary. It will take place on campus from May 1-4. We would like for you to come. It is important to remind people that the students were exercising their right to protest immoral wars. Some were just exercising their right to stand on the grass on their campus. **The government and the media always remind us of the killings in Tian'anmen Square. We need to remind people about the killings in Ohio and Mississippi.**

Mobilizing for this event will cost money, so we need your financial support in order to do the most effective possible job. The memory of these murders andcriplings has to be more than an asterisk in a high school history book.

One of Vietnam Veterans Against the War's military counselors, Johanna (Hans) Buwalda, got a call from a Vietnam Navy veteran who lived in the southwest. Bruce was struggling with the VA to get the benefits he was entitled to because he has PTSD as a result of his participation in combat. The VA would not believe he was in combat because the Navy does not award the "Combat Infantry Badge" that the VA normally uses as proof of combat service. The VA asked Bruce to write a narrative of his combat service, which was an extremely traumatic thing for him to do, because it brought up memories he was trying to forget.

Hans spoke with him on the phone and emailed with him every few days while he was in the writing process. If she did not hear from him, she contacted him to ask how he

was doing. Bruce's story was horrendous. His ship in the Navy attacked a coastal town in Vietnam over a period of five days. On the worst day, the Navy killed 1000 and injured 1200 Vietnamese, mostly women and children. To this day, Bruce cannot drive past a school without thinking of the children that were killed.

The VA denied his claim again, even after receiving the narrative, but Bruce nevertheless found writing out his story to be very healing. After years of not talking about it, he came to the realization that his story was worth telling and that people ought to know. He is planning to publish his story in the VVAW paper, *The Veteran*.

Through Ray Parrish, VVAW's other military counselor, Hans learned about a number of veterans who had received training to become peer counselors for other vets. After their training, they were expected to go out on their own and set up peer counseling groups. But these groups were not happening because setting up a counseling group would be a difficult task for anyone, let alone for a veteran who had never set up a group before. Moreover, the veterans had major PTSD issues of their own.

Hans meets with the peer counselors at their sites in homeless shelters and colleges. She helps them figure out how they want to meet the staff and the veterans at the site and assists them in following through on their plans. She works with them to help them overcome memory and concentration problems, and does some basic job training about issues like not scheduling your own VA appointment at the same time that your group is to meet. With Hans' support, several of these peer counselors are getting their groups up and running.

Veterans are supposed to receive health care from the VA and compensation for mental or physical injuries that occurred during their service. Many of the veterans who need these services most are denied because the PTSD which is disabling them now started while they were in the service and caused them to act in ways that led to their receiving other than honorable discharges. Ray Parrish has been helping these veterans access VA care and compensation for years. He guides them through the complex bureaucratic process of getting their discharges upgraded by showing that their "bad conduct" in the service was a result of PTSD.

Discharge upgrades can be a very laborious and time-consuming process, so Ray has not been able to keep up with all the requests for help. He has made a number of efforts to train volunteers to cover discharge upgrades and other VA claims, but this year he has finally succeeded in getting three committed volunteers to become fully trained and ready to take the test the VA offers so that they can become accredited VA Claims Representatives. Ray will connect these claims representatives with the peer counselors who are running PTSD groups so that they can work together.

Ray and Hans both are available to veterans and GIs nationally, and sometimes they get international calls or emails from soldiers on deployment. Veterans find them on the internet, but they both do personal outreach by participating and helping at events around the US. For example, Hans participated in the IVAW national retreat in Albuquerque, and is planning to attend the IVAW Women's retreat as well as the IVAW National Convention.

**Vietnam Veterans Against the War was the first veterans group to bring up the question of Agent Orange poisonings in Vietnam.** We didn't know then that this defoliant was killing Americans, but we knew that Agent Orange was causing birth defects and miscarriages in pregnant Vietnamese women. We demanded an immediate stop to its use.

We were also the first group to expose the defoliants' deadly effects on US service people. We joined forces with Maude DeVictor, the VA worker who originally discovered and exposed Agent Orange poisoning. In the last several years we have been working with Vietnamese Agent Orange victims to inform people in the US about their continued suffering, now 35 years after the last shot was fired.

Agent Orange affects not only children but even grandchildren of people who were exposed. We have been working with Congressman Conyers to come up with a comprehensive bill that would provide compensation for our children's extreme problems, both Vietnamese and American. We expect to have this bill introduced in Congress this year. In the near future, we are going to need your practical help to lobby your congressperson and senators in order to get this bill passed. We are not foolish enough to think we will get this passed in the first year. But we will get it passed

This Agent Orange campaign will not be cheap. So again we are seeking your generous support to bring this dark chapter of the Vietnam War to a just conclusion.

Because of your financial contributions, Vietnam Veterans Against the War has been able to offer major and badly needed support for Iraq Veterans Against the War's new Field Organizing Program. It is very rare for anti-war organizations to have full-time, paid organizers, to systematically develop leadership among their members, and to plan, not just for the next month or even the next year, but to look five or ten years down the road. This is what IVAW is doing as it works to encourage members to make a lifetime commitment to working for peace and justice. Without your help, this might not be happening.

One of their specific campaigns is to support Marc Hall, an African American soldier who committed the following "crimes": making a formal complaint about inadequate mental health service at his base, writing an angry rap song about being stop-lossed, and telling his command that he shouldn't go on a second deployment because he was so burnt out that he could indirectly harm his fellow soldiers. The Army interpreted his words and his song as threats and put him into the local county jail with real criminals for three months. Just recently he was transferred to Kuwait for his court martial, conveniently denying him access to his civilian defense attorney.

IVAW initiated a defense committee for Marc and is calling on people to write his commander and to write Marc in jail when his Kuwait address is available. VVAW has endorsed this campaign. The Army's sudden transfer of Marc to Kuwait prevents us from giving you the updated addresses for Marc and his new commander. Hopefully by the time you receive this letter, the information will be available at **www.vvaw.org** and at **www.ivaw.org**. Keep checking back, but, meanwhile, you can protest Marc's treatment by emailing President Obama at [www.whitehouse.gov/contact](http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact).

Last January, Aaron and Jason, two of the IVAW field organizers, were driving back from the national strategy meeting they had just held for IVAW chapter leaders. They left Albuquerque in a snowstorm and arrived in Memphis late that night.

Next morning they went to the Martin Luther King Museum in Memphis. They were haunted by what they had seen as they drove on to Alabama. They talked about Marc Hall and the gross violation of his rights. Then a light bulb went on: GIs and veterans need Civil Rights themselves. Jason asked, why don't we write a GI and Veterans' Bill of Rights? We should articulate how stop loss, denial of mental health treatment, denial of CO status, being sent to illegal wars, government lies about the purposes of wars and quick homecomings are violations of our rights.

With Aaron's support, the Atlanta chapter of IVAW is writing a draft of the GI Bill of Rights so that chapters all over the country can campaign to get it written into the law as part of the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

VVAW members are eager to begin supporting this campaign. Meanwhile Vietnam Veterans Against the War activists all over the country are attending demonstrations and vigils, telling high school students what life in the military is really like, answering calls from veterans who need to talk to another vet, supporting war resisters, sponsoring speakers and films, and supporting IVAW locally.

Again thank you for your support of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. We know you are not able to donate every time you receive one of these updates, but **if you are able to contribute at this time, you will help us support IVAW's organizing among recent veterans and active duty soldiers, enable soldiers and veterans to receive help in an anti-war context, support the victims of Agent Orange in their struggle for just compensation, and help us teach the lessons of Vietnam, which are so much needed in the present time.**

Sincerely,



Barry Romo  
National Coordinator

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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](http://vvaaw.org).

Name (print) \_\_\_\_\_  
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