



VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

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Dear fellow activist,

I am so pleased to be able to tell you about how Vietnam Veterans Against the War has been using your very generous donations. Thanks to your support, we have come a long way from the early 2000's when we had to reach into our pockets to scrape together enough money to print the newspaper.

Today we are able to employ two veterans' and military counselors. Thanks to you, we can carry out our own program but also can offer major support to our younger brothers and sisters in Iraq Veterans Against the War.

Because of you, VVAW was able to send National Coordinators, Marty Webster and Buzz Doyle to lead a VVAW contingent in the One America "Demand the Change You Voted For" march that was held in Washington DC on October 2. The VVAW contingent joined the peace movement section of the march, along with representative of many other progressive movements. We all called on our government to focus on jobs and human needs.

You are part of the reason Iraq Veterans Against the War is able to begin its new organization-wide campaign, "Operation Recovery: Stop the Deployment of Traumatized Soldiers."

As a step toward their goal of stopping the deployment of all soldiers to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, IVAW is focusing public attention on the special cruelty of deploying soldiers with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, with trauma resulting from rape and sexual harassment, and with Traumatic Brain Injury from explosions that cause brain damage. Instead of receiving adequate treatment, these soldiers are sent off to be re-traumatized.

On October 7, IVAW members hand delivered letters to every member of the House and Senate Armed Service Committees. The letters expressed their outrage at the abusive but all too common practice of deploying traumatized troops.

I would also like to invite you to join members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War as we support IVAW's campaign to end the deployment of traumatized troops. You can help by contacting your own congressional representatives and by writing letters to the editors of your local papers. You can find more information on the issue at www.ivaw.org.

I myself have had the privilege of joining Chicago Iraq Veterans Against the War as they supported a soldier protesting the lack of mental health screening for his unit and protesting the apparent plan to send them to Afghanistan without training in using either the weapons or the vehicles they will have to use when deployed. I participated in meetings with our

Senator and Representative. They both agreed to put pressure on the military.

We did not succeed in stopping the deployment altogether, but the military jumped to do mental health screening, resulting in four of the soldiers not having to deploy. They also offered better training that may save the soldiers' lives or the lives of Afghan civilians who might have been endangered by panicked, untrained troops. We cannot call this a victory with all but four soldiers being deployed. However, the soldiers have seen the effectiveness of their resistance. And we have learned that the military is vulnerable to valid accusations of mistreatment of the troops.

Your contributions to Vietnam Veterans Against the War helped pay for the salary of IVAW's lead Field Organizer, Aaron Hughes. Aaron has had exciting successes in areas of the country that we usually consider to be very conservative. He went to Wichita, Kansas to talk with Ethan McCord, the soldier shown on the "Collateral Murder" video released by Wikileaks. Ethan was the one helping the wounded child. Later he was chastised by his superiors for doing so. After talking with Aaron, Ethan became a member of IVAW.

Now Ethan is working with IVAW member William Stewart-Starcks on an Arkansas, Kansas, and Oklahoma college speaking tour. Thanks in part to you, there will soon be new IVAW chapters in Kansas and Arkansas. Local members in Georgia, North Carolina, Illinois, and Michigan are also setting up college tours. The tours will particularly emphasize outreach to veterans on the campuses.

Because of your support, Vietnam Veterans Against the War has been able to make a financial contribution to Iraq Veterans Against the War's first ever retreat for women IVAW members. **Again because of your support, Johanna (Hans) Buwalda, one of VVAW's veterans' counselors, was able to attend the retreat and facilitate as participants shared their experiences as women veterans.**

Hans brought art materials that the women used to express their experiences through visual arts. Ellen made a painting and collage that looked like a mandala. The inner circle was blood red and she added pieces of "combat paper" that came from previous Combat Paper Project workshops where veterans cut up their uniforms and made the cloth into paper.

The red faded into orange and yellow toward the outside of Ellen's canvas. The retreat was held in a forested area, so she added leaves from the forest. She told Hans that the red symbolized the military, Ellen's core identity. The leaves were there to indicate that, at this healing retreat, Ellen was able to expand her identity beyond the military.

Hans also led a workshop on mental health in which the women developed a list of questions they would like to ask a new provider—a therapist, a doctor a yoga teacher—before scheduling a first appointment. The women from the workshop will be writing up a pamphlet for the use other women veterans.

Also at the workshop, the women decided to work with Ann Jones, who had spent time in Kabul and has written about Afghan women's struggle. They will work with Ann to develop

plans for a program in solidarity with Afghan women.

Back in Chicago, Hans is doing a large number of mental health evaluations for veterans with Other Than Honorable (OTH) or Bad Conduct discharges. Some veterans display behavior that leads to such a discharge because of trauma and/or Traumatic Brain Injuries. Instead of a bad discharge, they should probably have been offered mental health services.

If Hans can document that the behavior that led to the OTH was caused by a mental or physical injury while in the service, it is possible to request that a veteran's discharge be upgraded. Once upgraded, the veteran becomes eligible to apply for the VA care, services and benefits they so desperately need.

Many veterans contact Hans from states other than Illinois. She is therefore working with therapists in other states to train them on writing the kind of evaluations that their clients need to receive the honorable discharge and the services to which they are entitled.

I am so glad that, thanks to you, Vietnam Veterans Against the War can afford to employ our military counselor, Ray Parrish. I was very moved when he told me this story:

Don called Ray after going AWOL. He had been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan and he was initially glad to be part of the effort to win the people's hearts and minds. Originally he was directing artillery fire from a distance. Things changed when he was assigned to doing house to house searches. Now he saw the faces of "the enemy." He realized that he wasn't winning hearts and minds; he was frightening people. Or worse.

He began to have trouble sleeping. He started to think that his being in Afghanistan at all, even his wearing the uniform, was wrong. He went to military doctors who dismissed his concerns. They told him he was just following orders. There was no reason for him to have sleepless nights and let this bother him. He should just tough it out.

Desperate, Don went AWOL. He tried to talk to friends and family, but they just told him he shouldn't feel bad, that the war was justified and his own conduct was not only justified but honorable. He drank heavily. He was startled at any loud noise. He had angry outbursts toward his family.

Don accidentally ran into another veteran his own age who voiced anti-war views. Still AWOL, Don was afraid to tell him that he was on active duty, but this encounter was incredibly important: Don had thought he was alone, the only veteran who thought about the war the way he did. After meeting the veteran, he searched the Internet, found veterans' anti-war resources, the VVAW web site, and Ray.

Don's story reminds me how important Ray and Hans are. Ray tells me how often PTSD is entangled with issues of conscience. Don could never have gotten the advice and support he needed from the VA or a mainstream veteran's organization.

When Don called Ray, they talked for two hours. At the end Don had a little bit of hope.

Ray and Don began talking on a weekly basis. Although he was in fact a Conscientious Objector, Don ultimately decided that the best approach would be for him to turn himself in and seek a discharge on the basis of his PTSD.

Ray referred Don to a mental health provider from the network that Hans has developed. Reading his own psychological evaluation gave Don a sense of personal validation. Armed with the evaluation, he turned himself in. He was determined to get out of the Army however long it took. He expected to be put in jail.

Confined to barracks, Don continued to seek support from Ray on a daily basis. Initially, the military denied him mental health treatment. Don had to agitate for it for a whole month. To get treatment, he went to the chaplain, to his commander, and to the Emergency Room.

Because of Ray, Don knew that the command was violating military regulations by denying him care. Eventually he received treatment from a military psychologist who was actually very helpful. After four painful months, he received a General Discharge Under Honorable Conditions. That meant that he was eligible for VA health benefits. He is now back with his family and in treatment at his local Vet Center.

Don told Ray that he had literally saved his life. He had been thinking of committing suicide when he first called Ray. And, without Ray, he certainly would have killed himself while going through the stress and uncertainty of his four months of confinement after he turned himself in.

I will have to wait until next time to have enough space to tell you about the activities of our dedicated local members and about my recent trip representing VVAW in Germany.

For now, I will close with thanking you for your support of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. If you are able to make a tax-deductible contribution at this time, you will enable us to continue all the programs that I have been speaking about. I know that you cannot donate every time you receive an update, but, if you are able, you will be contributing to justice for veterans and to keeping alive the lessons of Vietnam that are so relevant today.

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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