



# VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

---

PO Box 2065, Station A Champaign, IL 61825-2065 (773) 276-4189

[www.vvaw.org](http://www.vvaw.org)

[vvaw@vvaw.org](mailto:vvaw@vvaw.org)

June 2011

Dear fellow activist,

**You are one of the reasons Vietnam Veterans Against the War continues today as a vibrant, effective organization.** Without your financial support, we could never be a national presence in opposition to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and we could never offer concrete help to veterans who have been abandoned by our government. We could never provide such a major financial contribution to the organizing done by Iraq Veterans Against the War. Thank you for being with us.

There are so many veterans who need help. Ray Parrish, our Military Counselor, got a call from Charles, a homeless veteran who had been living in his car. Then the car was towed and taken to the police auto pound while he was at his VA therapy appointment.

Charles was applying for compensation for the PTSD he is suffering as a result of his tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. All the paperwork for his claim was in the car. He was unable to come up with the amount of money it would cost to retrieve the car.

The Veterans Service Organization that was helping with Charles' claim didn't deal with the police so they referred him to a veterans' legal clinic. The clinic also didn't deal with police, but they referred Charles to Ray. Ray then made some phone calls and arranged for Charles to get access to the papers and clothes he had left in his car.

So much of what Ray does is to help those who have fallen through the cracks of the organizations and government agencies whose mission is to help veterans.

When the VA accepts a veteran with a bad discharge, it does so provisionally pending the decision of the VA Regional Office as to whether the veteran's "character of service" was honorable. All too frequently, the Regional Office issues a denial, even when the veteran is presenting good evidence. Upon the denial, the veteran can no longer continue his or her treatment at the VA.

This is where Ray comes in. Mainstream veterans organizations rarely help veterans with appealing a determination that the character of their service was not honorable. But Ray does. He reports a 100% success rate on these appeals because appeals go to supervisors who are under pressure to avoid issuing denials that will later be overturned in court.

Ray could never keep up with all these appeals and discharge upgrade requests. He was developing a backlog of cases so he started a training program for volunteers. Three

highly qualified women completed Ray's training and successfully passed the exam to be VA Claim Representatives. Now they are volunteering 10-20 hours a week. Under Ray's supervision, they are filing claims, filing appeals, and getting discharge upgrades.

In addition, the women are responding to the letters VVAW receives from incarcerated veterans. Often these veterans get very inadequate medical care. They certainly don't get care from doctors who are knowledgeable about Agent Orange medical issues.

Karen, one of the new VA Claims Representatives, has volunteered to respond to incarcerated veterans from Texas. She talks to doctors who work in the prison and to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, which has a grievance procedure. She has talked to the VA in Texas. She has found that they are very poorly equipped to carry out their mission. She has also reached out to the Texas Civil Rights Project. As a result of their collaboration with Karen, the Project is starting a special program for veterans.

The other new VA Claims Representatives, Libby and Dedre, have taken charge of the letters from incarcerated veterans from Florida, Illinois, Wisconsin, and other states. They too have to go way beyond helping with VA claims. Like Karen, they are working to address systemic problems that are affecting the veterans who write.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War staff therapist Johanna (Hans) Buwalda regularly gets calls from women veterans and active duty service members. She tells me that 100% of the women who contact her suffer from Military Sexual Trauma, which includes both sexual assault and sexual harassment. Many have been raped by fellow service members, some more than once. Every woman she has talked to has felt the threat of rape. No woman has ever reported that the perpetrator was punished.

Women service members often stop drinking liquids after a certain point in that day so that they will not have to urinate after dark. They are the most vulnerable to attack at night in the halls or on the way to latrines. As a result of withholding urination, they are very vulnerable to urinary tract infections.

Even if women service members report a sexual assault, they are often asked to go back to work with their unit, the unit that includes the man who raped them. It is not unusual for the rapist to be their supervisor. Women are especially vulnerable on Navy ships. One told Hans that, after being raped by a male sailor, the story seemed to get around the ship and she continued to be harassed and raped by others. "It is as if I had a sticker on my head that said 'Rape me.'"

Hans continues to offer therapy, provide psychological evaluations that are needed for benefits claims and discharge upgrades, and offers training to other mental health professionals around the country, particularly training on how to write an effective evaluation. She continues to find referrals for veterans all over the country.

**Your contributions to VVAW enables us to offer major financial support to Iraq Veterans Against the War.** From my previous updates, you know about Operation Recovery: Stop the Deployment of Traumatized Troops, IVAW's campaign to help service

members and veterans broadly by fighting for a change in policies and practices that harm veterans with Military Sexual Trauma, Traumatic Brain Injury, and PTSD. The campaign is also a tactic in the struggle to end the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan by draining the supply of deployable troops.

IVAW's campaign strategy focuses pressure on a particular demand and a particular target. The first focus of pressure is Gen. Donald Campbell, the Commander at Ft. Hood, Texas. Ft. Hood had 22 suicides last year, more than twice as many as any other post. Field organizing staff and temporary residential organizers have led an escalating set of tactics to press Gen. Campbell to meet with them to discuss Fort Hood soldiers' right to heal.

IVAW started with a polite letter making the request, then organized an email campaign, and then attempted to hand deliver a letter. The organizers then erected a watchtower just outside the post. The watchtower or guardtower was like the towers the military erects when troops are deployed so that guards can monitor what is going on outside the area. The watchtower sent the message to General Campbell that he is now on watch.

Veterans took turns staffing the watchtower all through the Memorial Day weekend. They also passed out purple hearts, the medal the military gives wounded troops, to soldiers going in and out of the base. Many of those who accepted the purple hearts expressed appreciation for what IVAW is doing.

Also on Memorial Day, the organizers erected a memorial on the post. They put up 23 flags, 22 to remember the 22 Ft. Hood service members who committed suicide and one more to represent those who also committed suicide but were not in the official count. The organizers will continue to reach out and develop relationships with service members at Ft. Hood throughout the summer.

**I hope you feel proud that, through your financial contributions, you have been a part of this remarkable effort.**

A deployed service member named Jeff found the Operation Recovery Facebook page and posted: "I am a soldier and have experienced multiple TBI's (Traumatic Brain Injuries, usually as a result of being close to explosions). I spent 2 months at the TBI level III clinic this deployment. I have been returned to duty and still need constant medical attention... . But due to mission and location my ability to see a doctor is very limited and I'm constantly running out of my medications....Glad to see someone cares and understands what our nation is putting us through."

Operation Recovery and all of IVAW's programs would be much less effective without the paid organizers that your financial contributions help make possible. With your support, IVAW has been able to hire two new organizers, one additional, and one to replace an organizer who stepped down. They are Andrew Wright, a veteran who had been the coordinator of Coffee Strong, the GI coffeehouse outside Ft. Lewis, and Maggie Martin, who served two tours in Iraq in the US Army Signal Corps. She is a member of Warrior Writers and has published a blog post about her experience as a woman veteran and as a survivor of Military Sexual Trauma.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War members are active all around the US. To give just a few examples, VVAW members in many locations participated in anti-war Memorial Day events. They speak to high school classes to give the students a more realistic picture of the military than the one they get from military recruiters. Several VVAW chapters participate in Standdowns for homeless veterans.

I was particularly inspired by a recent conversation with Jan Ruhman of San Diego Vietnam Veterans Against the War. A San Diego member who was homeless at the time initiated a "Ponchos and Sleeping Bags" project during a rainy 30 degree winter night. VVAW and Veterans For Peace raised enough money to distribute 550 sleeping bags and rain ponchos to the homeless community, of whom 30-40% are veterans, according to a recent survey.

San Diego VVAW cooperated with Veterans For Peace to set up a display of 1500 crosses plus 67 tombstones for Sunday and Monday of Memorial Day weekend. The tombstones represented the 67 deaths of service members from San Diego killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Jan and an Iraq veteran slept over Sunday night with an additional display of 500 battery operated candles.

Thank you so very much for your generous support of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Without you, we could never achieve all we are accomplishing. **If you are able to make a tax-deductible donation today, you will enable us to continue opposing the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, continue making a difference in the lives of veterans in crisis. You will enable us to continue to strengthen Iraq Veterans Against the War by providing financial as well as moral support.**

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. Donations to VVAW are tax deductible. You can also donate online at [www.vvaw.org](http://www.vvaw.org), a one-time or monthly donation.

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

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address (please print clearly) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

I am interested in sustaining VVAW with a monthly donation, contact me.

I am interested in donating stock to VVAW, contact me.