



THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

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Champaign-Urbana Counter-Recruitment Fair

MIKE STEWART

"Are you thinking of going into the military? Then there's some information that you need to know first." This was the message that the VVAW chapter in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois brought to high school students and community members thinking about enlisting in the armed forces. Because it's not an easy choice and because especially students can feel pressure to join up when all they are presented is the government's side of the story, VVAW members worked to ensure that those considering joining the military would be able to make an informed choice and were aware of the possible consequences.

On Friday, May 21 and Saturday, May 22, VVAW national coordinator Barry Romo and Chicago-area member Ray Parrish (a military counselor for over twenty years) spoke to classes at local high schools (*see related article on page 8*) and at a counter-recruitment fair about their experiences in the military, government misinformation, and other options open to young people considering enlistment. The fair, organized by the local C-U chapter of VVAW,

was held at the Illinois Disciples Foundation and coincided with the Midwest regional meeting taking place there that weekend.

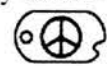
"A lot of people going into the military don't know what they're doing, period," said Ray Parrish in his talk at the fair. Among other topics, he spoke about racism, sexual assault and harassment, misleading information that recruiters often give to young people, and the erosion of benefits promised to veterans. "Young people need to know

about the full life in the military, not just what the recruiter gives them," he added.

Along with talks by Ray and Barry, there were video showings that ran all day and information tables set up and staffed by members from across the Midwest. The booths had a variety of themes, including "Enlistment and General Military Counseling" and "Conscientious Objector Information," as well as a table dedicated to veterans' issues.

The counter-recruitment fair

was covered by two local television stations and was visited by almost thirty people. All those in attendance agreed that VVAW needs to do more of this kind of outreach in the schools and the community in the future.



MIKE STEWART IS A UNION ORGANIZER FOR THE GRADUATE EMPLOYEES ORGANIZATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AND A MEMBER OF THE C-U VVAW CHAPTER.



Urbana High School students listen to VVAW National Coordinator Barry Romo. Photo by John Dixon. Reprinted by permission of the News-Gazette

Memorial Day 1999, Milwaukee

DAVE KETTENHOFEN

The VVAW Milwaukee Chapter pulled double-duty over this year's Memorial Day weekend. On Sunday they took part in a protest rally, initiated by the DAV, over federal budget cuts of veterans' health care benefits. Then on Monday they participated in the annual Memorial Day ceremonies held at the VA's Wood National Cemetery. Each event drew between fifteen and twenty Milwaukee Chapter members.

The Sunday rally outside the main entrance of the VA Hospital in Wood, Wisconsin brought out about 200 veterans and their supporters. Speakers pointed out that President Clinton proposed freez-

ing federal spending for veterans' health care at \$17.3 billion, yet at the same time called for new health care initiatives. These new programs would have to be paid for with cuts in other VA programs.

"We can't stay at a flat-line budget and make it work," said a speaker from the DAV. "There's an obligation to take care of those who served."

Another charged that the government is committing developmental genocide against veterans. "Developmental genocide is undertaken for economic gain. A government might use this type of genocide against people who may have an undesirable drain on the

federal funds, such as poor people, veterans, and old people."

All of Wisconsin's congressmen and senators were invited to

address the rally but only one found the time to show up. Democratic congressman Tom Barrett

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**VIETNAM
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From the National Office

JOE MILLER

Comrades and friends! With this Spring/Summer issue of 1999, we'd like to report on the continued good response to VVAW mailings over the past months. New and renewed memberships keep rolling in, and financial contributions of modest size are often included. We express our deep appreciation to all of you for such support, and for your continuing work in peace and social justice areas.

This issue reflects the wide range of activities that VVAW has been involved in since last fall. You will find reports of Memorial Day activities that highlight our continued work with veterans' issues such as homelessness, service-connected injuries (Agent Orange, Gulf War Syndrome, PTSD, etc.), pensions for spouses, and broader peace and social justice issues.

Historical pieces on the Vietnam war era and recollections of service in wartime and in protest may also be found here. Poetry and film or book reviews have become regular features of the paper. We present a review of the very important film about Clarence Fitch, a VVAW brother who passed away in 1990, "Another Brother."

You will also find materials

that reflect the debate and discussion within VVAW over the Balkan conflict. Please note that these articles/speeches were written at the height of NATO actions and reflect events in that time period. The National Office, recognizing that our organization was divided on the issue, decided early on not to take a national position. Our consistent efforts to attain consensus on major issues of this sort would not allow us to do anything else. This was reflected both in our Midwest regional meeting and in Memorial Day events in Chicago. As one Chicago member put it, this is a testament to VVAW's strength and courage.

Many of us in the Midwest participated in a "Counter-recruitment Fair" for high school students in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois following the regional meeting. This prompted a deep discussion within the National Office about how we might be more effective in this work and make VVAW even more visible on a range of issues.


We are putting forth this challenge to all of you who receive this paper:

(1) **make** your voice and/or your chapter's voice heard on the issue of widows' pensions;

(2) **take** one day off from work to speak to at least one high school or college class each year about Vietnam and VVAW's continuing work (if you need help, contact the National Office);

(3) **finally**, tell the National Office about your efforts; write an article for *The Veteran*.

If everyone who receives this issue of the paper does these things, people will have to recognize the continued relevance and importance of VVAW. We will be more successful in fighting those right-wing efforts to shove us into the "dustbin of history."

Finally, the next meeting of the National Steering Committee in Chicago should provide us with upbeat reports on what our active chapters and members have been doing. In recent years we have seen a new vitality in the work of VVAW, and we must build on this. Get out there and do something! Also, we continue to need funds to carry out the work of VVAW. If you can spare a few dollars, please send it to the National Office post office box. Remember, donations are tax-deductible. 

JOE MILLER IS A NATIONAL COORDINATOR OF VVAW AND A MEMBER OF VVAW'S CHAMPAIGN-URBANA CHAPTER.

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Where We Came From, Who We Are, Who Can Join

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc. (VVAW) is a national veterans' organization that was founded in New York City in 1967 after six Vietnam vets marched together in a peace demonstration. It was organized to voice the growing opposition among returning servicemen and women to the still-raging war in Indochina, and grew rapidly to a membership of over 30,000 throughout the United States as well as active duty GIs stationed in Vietnam. Through ongoing actions and grassroots organization, VVAW exposed the ugly truth about US involvement in Southeast Asia and our first-hand experiences helped many other Americans to see the unjust nature of that war.

VVAW quickly took up the struggle for the rights and needs of veterans. In 1970, we started the first rap groups to deal with

traumatic after-effects of war, setting the example for readjustment counselling at Vet Centers now. We exposed the shameful neglect of many disabled vets in VA Hospitals and helped draft legislation to improve educational benefits and create job programs. VVAW fought for amnesty for war resisters, including vets with bad discharges. We helped make known the negative health effects of exposure to chemical defoliants and the VA's attempts to cover-up these conditions as well as their continued refusal to provide treatment and compensation for many Agent Orange Victims.

Today our government is still financing and arming undemocratic and repressive regimes around the world. Recently, American troops have been sent into combat in the Middle East and Central America, for many of the same misguided reasons that

were used to send us to Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, many veterans are still denied justice - facing unemployment, discrimination, homelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder and other health problems, while already inadequate services are being cut back or eliminated.

We believe that service to our country and communities did not end when we were discharged. We remain committed to the struggle for peace and for social and economic justice for all people. We will continue to oppose senseless military adventures and to teach the real lessons of the Vietnam War. We will do all we can to prevent another generation from being put through a similar tragedy and we will continue to demand dignity and respect for veterans of all eras. This is real patriotism and we remain true to our mission. JOIN US!



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BILL SHUNAS

Many members of VVAW are supportive of the NATO bombing for what seems to be either or both of two reasons. One is humanitarian concerns. The Serb army is involved in the ethnic cleansing of Kosovar Albanians, which is a nice way of saying murder, rape, pillage and the creation of the misery involved in making hundreds of thousands of refugees. Therefore, no matter what the motive is behind the bombing, if it punishes the Serbs for ethnic cleansing, it should be supported because it might get them to stop.

The second reason given to support bombing seems to be that it will give the Kosovo Liberation Army the time and space to grow strong enough to enable it to liberate Kosovo from Serbia and establish an independent state, which is only just and right.

The problem with these lines of reasoning is that these are not the motivations of NATO. Motive determines policy. Already you can see where NATO actions are not in line with what should have been done if this was a humanitarian operation. There may be some element of punishing Serbia for what it is doing, but there is no element of preventing Serbia from what it is doing.

Maybe 10% of Bill Clinton's heart acted for humanitarian reasons or maybe someone in NATO pushed for this action because that someone believed it was just. Humanitarianism is not, however, the motivation behind U.S./NATO

action. Rather, humanitarianism is the propaganda hook by which Clinton and company gain public support for their action. Remember, good propaganda uses truth (like the evident murder, rape and pillage) to encourage support for action that may or may not be aimed at what the public wants — in this case, ending ethnic cleansing.

What are NATO's motives, and within that, what are the U.S. motives? Humanitarianism? To showcase the new NATO? To test weapons? To level down ordnance so that arms manufacturers may profit through resupply? To become the policeman for the New World Order? I suspect a little of each of the above are behind NATO's action with the dominant motive being the policeman role for the New World Order. Deviants like Milosevic represent instability that inhibits the spread of global capitalism. Having said this, I suspect the basic motive is changing. They've bombed for six weeks with little effect. Bombing has increased the Serb will to resist. Like the last eight and a half years of Vietnam, the motive now is to save face.

I think it was evident from the start from NATO's military strategy that these actions had nothing to do with humanitarianism. The bombing would not inhibit or punish ethnic cleansing in a way that the humanitarians wished. To do that would have required troops on the ground. That would have required troop

staging before the fact and would have been a tremendous logistical problem. For example, supplies would have to be railroaded through mountains where sappers are supreme. (Maybe if there was a suitable airstrip in which to run supplies, you could have dropped in the 101st to take it with a bloody battle, but no one talked about this.)

Troops on the ground raises all kinds of other questions, but the point is that NATO didn't do it. For their purposes, they don't need troops until after some kind of cease-fire happens. Therefore, with only high altitude bombing, there was no prevention of ethnic cleansing in this picture. Some say the bombing speeded up and increased atrocities, and some say it would have eventually happened anyway. It didn't make any difference who was right with the strategy NATO used.

As for the argument that NATO action will give the KLA time to develop, I suspect that NATO will turn against the KLA. Early peace talks, which included NATO and the Russians, mention disarming the KLA as part of the deal. I foresee a time when peace is declared, and either NATO or the UN or a combination of their troops will be sent to enforce it. These troops will spend more time and energy fighting and/or disarming the KLA than they will with the Serb army. The little time and space created for the KLA created by high altitude bombing will rapidly disappear.

Some of us in VVAW are automatically opposed to U.S. military intervention anywhere in the world. That's not where I'm coming from. Once I even thought sending in the troops was a good thing — in Haiti. It turned an impoverished, starving, brutalized people into an impoverished, starving people with space to breathe — not much good, but something. Intervention in Yugoslavia serves not even that much purpose, and it would be only accidental that the motives of NATO coincided with the best interests of the Kosovars. That accident didn't happen.

One more thing: I think you sometimes have to recognize the role individuals play. I think the Commander-in-Chief was really stupid, and he was being advised by a secretary of state with a vacuum tube between her ears. Bill Clinton seems to like bombing. After being labeled a draft dodger, maybe he felt the need to exude testosterone beyond the girls in the office. So he bombs. He bombs Iraq a couple of times and Sudan and Afghanistan for which he gets some good publicity on the home front. Then against all military advice, Bomber Bill hits Yugoslavia, and now we're all in deep shit. ☺

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Another Brother Looks At "Another Brother"

A REVIEW BY HORACE COLEMAN

Clarence Fitch was just a name to me. As in "the Clarence Fitch VVAW chapter." Subject of a documentary called "Another Brother." "Coming soon to a PBS station near you," e-mail promised.

"Another Brother" shows the man, the circumstances and environment that shaped him and the forces that drove him. Before the documentary ended I said to myself "Yeah, I know that guy!"

I "know" Clarence Fitch — as a person like and unlike many other black men with similar life circumstances. People who went through 'Nam and the Sixties (local and personal variations op-

Fitch's story is more than a black man's life story . . . It's a variation of "every vet" — of many men and women who went through a peculiarity that caressed and scarred them and America.

tional) and emerged as distinct individuals with some common characteristics. American expectations, fears and hopes.

"Another Brother" introduces you to a real man with real

character flaws and gem-like qualities, living a real, often gritty, life.

Fitch's story is more than a black man's life story — or even a black vet's. It's a variation of "every vet" — of many men and

women who went through a peculiarity that caressed and scarred them and America.

He — and you and I — spent a crucial time in a place and atmosphere where the "it don't mean nothing" outlook was a major way of temporarily "explaining" forces, actions and interactions that gripped too tightly.

Removed from the front burner of military experience in-country (where you boiled), we were put on a back burner where our memories simmered (or boiled over again). We found ourselves — and our outlooks on,

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Youth, Militarism And Alternatives: A Strategy For Youth Organizing

BARRY ROMO AND DAVE CURRY

Our goal is to (1) briefly analyze what happens to today's youth when they are faced with the burden or choice of military service and to (2) describe what can effectively serve as an alternative.

ANALYSIS OF THE MILITARY IN AMERICAN LIFE

Youth action organizing that is an alternative to military service must meet the human growth needs of young people and at the same time bring them into a life of organized political practice. In order to describe such youth organizing, we need to look at the role that the military currently plays in the lives of American youth. How do youth view the military? How does the military shape the values of youth who are not in it? Why do they ultimately join the military?

TODAY'S MILITARY

Research on military service in the post-Vietnam era has emphasized the degree to which service has become increasingly driven by economic considerations, but we believe that other considerations remain as important. The military still offers itself as the central institution in our society that opposes terrorism and defends the nation.

CHANGING NATURE OF MILITARY SERVICE

In his classic piece of research on combat soldiers in World War II, S.L.A. Marshall discovered that only fifteen percent of soldiers fired their weapons under fire. He proposed that with proper training, the U.S. armed forces could become more effective with respect to firepower and killing potential. Studies of soldiers in Vietnam showed that Marshall's premise had become a reality. Almost 100% of U.S. combat soldiers in Vietnam fired their weapons in conflict. Between the premise and the realization had come a complete metamorphosis of the U.S. combat soldier. Younger, and with less pre-service experience of the world, the U.S. soldier has become a more effi-

cient product of behavioral science. Perhaps most important has been the creation of a "new morality" for the young soldiers, a morality that is more in tune with the demands of modern warfare. (One writer described the Vietnam War as a moral vacuum in a technological blizzard.) The aftermath of service, the Vietnam-era veteran, may not be as suc-

But again changes occurred. With the coming of the Reagan years, the exciting and patriotic aspects of military service came to be emphasized. In the years that followed, Desert Storm and the Persian Gulf War were orgies of patriotism and jingoism. Updated images of Rambo, Iron Eagle, and G.I. Joe became the male warrior caricatures in American youth



cessful a product, but the soldier was everything the World War II researchers had wanted.

By the end of the Vietnam War, no one wanted to join the armed forces. The general public had ceased to view the military as a viable career alternative and those serving were regarded as "chumps." The Army and Navy especially made major attempts to change their institutional images. The "new" action Army and at least limited uniform changes in all branches of service were the order of the day. Experts openly talked about the economic motivations for military service. Some mourned the plight of the post-Vietnam force as an army of the poor and minorities serving for non-patriotic reasons. ROTC in high schools and colleges experienced declines in enrollment and programs.

culture, and Demi Moore joined the male images as G.I. Jane. In tight job markets and the last years of the cold war, military recruiters had a fairly easy task.

This situation was not to continue. The U.S. emerged as the sole superpower. A rejuvenated U.S. economy allowed the demand for workers to surpass the demand for jobs. Military recruiters face new problems. Enlistment is down. The prospect of being at sea or overseas for long periods of time on "peacekeeping" missions have weakened the appeal of military service. Still, hundreds of thousands of young people continue to enlist. Women, minorities, immigrants, and the poorly educated are the primary targets of recruitment efforts

RITEs OF PASSAGE

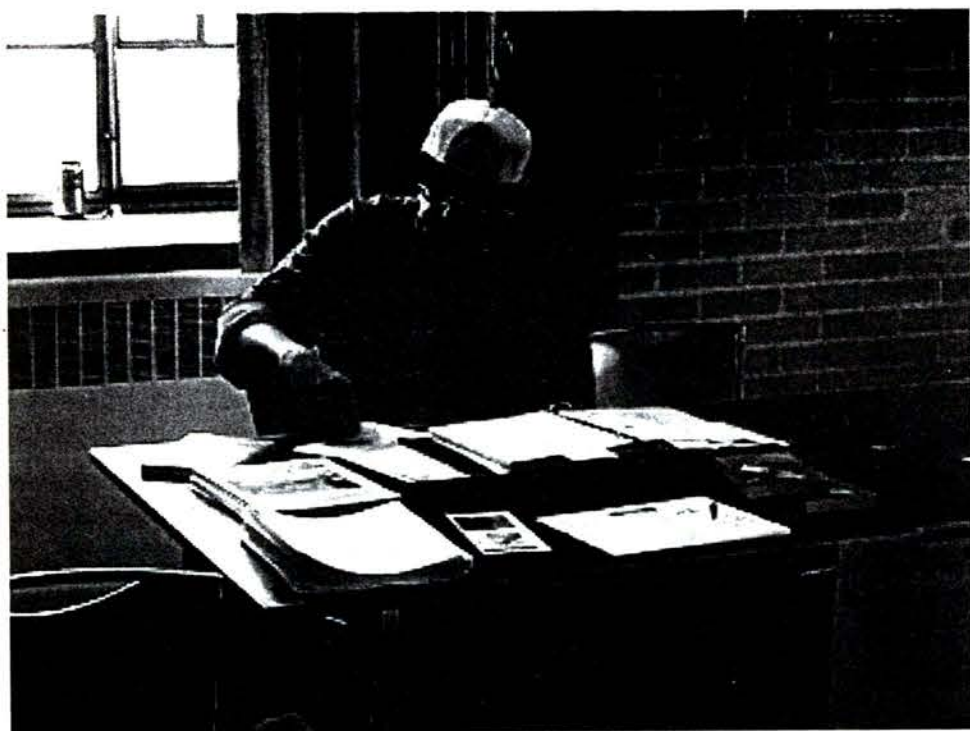
Young people, males and females, still use military service as a rite of passage to move from childhood to adult status and privilege. Young people still use military service as a method of escaping from what they perceive as oppression — or at best a humdrum existence — within their families. The military has strong cultural resources on its side: movies, television, and even history as it is sometimes marketed in the schools and media. Much of Hitler's success is said to have been due to his ability to appeal to manhood, heroism, and recognition. The new military, especially in its mass media advertisements, serves as a conduit for the same themes.

In our society, the military has many sister institutions. One in particular is this country's ubiquitous system of competitive sports. On one hand, organized sports activities teach skills of social interaction and build healthy bodies. On the other hand, sports convey the message that it is right to sacrifice self, personal dignity, and even previously working body parts to the cause of the team as symbolic neighborhood, school, town, family, and even nation. The coach is often the predecessor of the drill instructor. A letterman's jacket is the harbinger of medals, ribbons, and uniforms as instant material recognitions of manhood and physical achievement. Sports, like the modern military, embraces an ideology of action and sacrifice for its own sake.

Junior ROTC and its business partner, high school recruitment, work alongside sports programs more explicitly, providing uniforms, medals, and military discipline to their participants. Promises of bartering high school ROTC skills into college ROTC financial support and scholarships also have to be considered. Among non-participants comes a tendency to accept living in a social world where military symbols are ever-present.

Inside the family, the communication between father and child has long been a difficult process. Sports have provided one

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Rev. Jim Holiman prepares information at the Conscientious Objector table.

convenient subject for father-child interaction. But war stories are even better. What he did in military service (or at least some of what he did in military service) is an easy thing for a father to talk about to keep a child's attention. This father-child relation centering on military experience varies from family to family. For some, it's a passive social dalliance. For others, it's summers at brutal marine "bull pup" camps. Also to be considered is the simultaneous inheritance of manhood and military service when the maturing child enlists in the same branch of service that spawned those exciting stories of childhood. "My old man was a marine, and now I'm a marine." In today's setting, even young women may crave that piece of their inheritance from their father.

NATIONAL DEFENSE/ ANTI-TERRORISM

Military enthusiasm must have a tangible "enemy." This enemy is the military's reason to exist. An enemy must be sinister and powerful. Today's enemies are "small fry" made big with their potential to control weapons of mass destruction. "Suitcase" atomic bombs, sarin and other poison gases, anthrax and other biological terrors, and the ever-

present possibility of "destabilization" add appeal to the old opinion that "it's better to fight over there than over here!" This amalgamated enemy establishes the United States' need for a military.

The military's role in the lives of American youth depends on its special misperception as a major rite of passage and its misperception as the only protection against the terrorist enemy. These two misperceptions may not just prove fatal for individuals—they may prove fatal for us all. We offer here some characteristics that we feel viable youth organizing must have. We do not define the structure of this organizing, for that must come from youth itself.

YOUTH ORGANIZING

Youth organizing must foster a sense of purpose and personhood that goes beyond simple Ramboism but fulfills the desires of young men and women to be people who make a difference. For those who want more than anything to make a mark on their world, high-minded platitudes and the advice of adults "who know what's good for them" are notespecially appetizing. What young people want are their own challenges, their own adventures, and the opportunity to dis-

cover some truth of their own. What we must provide them is our guidance in creating democratically structured organizations that provide them the maximum opportunity for personal growth and collective experience. What we want them to have is a chance to make their discovery in a way that is different from our own discoveries made as youth in uniform.

RESISTANCE TO MILITARISM AND RECRUITMENT

One way we believe young people can do this is through their own confrontations with repressive institutions. There is no way that youth can mistake such activity as action that might be taken by "wimps" or "sissies." As Gandhi so often said, the people's strength can come from the unnecessary vile and violent reaction of our enemies to just and principled resistance.



John Berdusis and Barry Romo staff the VVAW literature table.

FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE

Young people want the world and their country to conform to their ideal of what is right and just. Chances to contribute to making the world conform to the ideals of youth are not part of a distant past; all around there remain struggles worth joining. Opposition to racist mascots for athletic teams, efforts to "take back the night" from rapists and abusers, struggles for racial and gender equality, and working toward the achievement of self-respect and human dignity in the workplace are all avenues of fulfilling action open to today's youth.

BRIGADES TO OTHER NATIONS

Immediate access to the ex-

periences of people in other places is another way young people can make their own place in the world. Service projects in which youth work side by side with third world peoples provide this sense of learning from one's own experience while gaining a sense of being part of a greater world struggle.

ROLE OF VETS

The real experience of Vietnam and other era veterans must be used as a resource in this organizing of youth. Our experience must be brought to bear as a weapon against the lies propagated by recruiters and politicians. Only we can speak with the authority that comes from our own knowledge of the realities of military service and war. Many high school and college age youth want to know what a bullet "really does" to a human being. We can tell them that, and we can tell them what being an instrument of destruction (either face-to-face or from a ship or plane) can do to a human conscience. The myths of military service must be smashed

against the truth of our reality. This is our strategy for organizing youth.

For youth taking part in these kinds of organizing activity, there is real adventure — personal adventure that is personally liberating and democratic in nature. It is the very opposite of the military training experience of "adventure" and "growth" through subjugation to unreasoning discipline for its own sake.

For 31 years, VVAW has continuously carried on a program of outreach to youth.



*BARRY ROMO AND DAVE CURRY ARE
NATIONAL COORDINATORS OF VVAW.*



People gather at the Counter-Recruitment Fair.

"We should not be mere e-mail activists!"

Chicago Memorial Day, 1999

JOE MILLER

The clouds threatened, the wind blew, but the weather finally cooperated with Chicago VVAW and out-of-town friends this Memorial Day. As the sun broke through, Barry Romo, VVAW National Coordinator and member of the Chicago chapter, greeted everyone. He pointed out that this was the twenty-eighth VVAW Memorial Day event in Chicago. It was only after VVAW began to get media attention with these events that the traditional veterans' organizations began to hold their parades and rallies in the city. This day, however, it seemed that the media was nowhere to be found.

This would have been a good day for media coverage, since Barry pointed out that for the first time in VVAW's history our organization has not taken a national position concerning an ongoing conflict. The war in the Balkans has supporters and opponents within the ranks of VVAW, he remarked. There is no consensus, though we respect each other's opinions. Therefore, this Memorial Day there would be speakers from each side of the issue.

The first speaker, Ray Parrish, a member of the Chicago chapter and a veterans' counselor, did not talk about the Balkans, however. Ray wanted to inform everyone of the disastrous situation concerning pensions for widows of veterans (see his article on page 7). He presented a detailed rundown on the current situation and called for everyone to write to Congress to demand an increase in these pensions. As Ray put it, Congress worries about a flag desecration amendment, but will not spend "dime one" on spouses of vets.

Barry next introduced Carl Nyberg, one of our younger members. Carl is a graduate of the Naval Academy and served with the UN peacekeeping force in Cambodia. Besides being a member of the Chicago chapter, he also works with Illinois Peace Action. Carl opened his comments on the Balkans with thanks to Barry and to VVAW for inviting him to speak. He said, "This is a testament to VVAW's strength and courage in giving voice to diverse opinions" on the Balkan war.

Carl pointed out reasons for his opposition to this war, how he

considered it illegal since it had no support from the United Nations and was even "outside the perimeter" of NATO. He also raised doubts about the "humanitarian concerns" that were used to justify the action. He ended with a call for negotiations to resolve the war. This was met with applause by many in the crowd.

Following Carl's remarks, Barry prodded members of the crowd to act, to act on their convictions, no matter which way they felt about the war. "Do something! We should not be mere e-mail activists!" he said. He challenged people to speak in high school and college classes at least once each year. All VVAW members and supporters should do something on the widows' pensions issue. Everyone should be able to come back on Veterans' Day and report on some action they have taken. "Oh, and pay your dues."

The next speaker was Claudia Lennhoff, member of the Champaign-Urbana chapter and the executive director of Champaign County Health Care Consumers (CCHCC), an organization that Ralph Nader has described as the best of its kind in the country. Claudia's lively remarks really fired everyone up (see text on page 12), and when she challenged everyone to have fun while engaging in activism, it really struck a positive chord with the crowd. As she left the podium and Barry stepped to the microphone, he commented, "It really gets the blood circulating!"

Bill Branson was then introduced, a comrade of Barry's for nearly thirty years. Barry reminded everyone how important Bill has been to VVAW in passing along our experiences in security and the holding of demonstrations. "Bill does not give speeches," Barry said, "but he is so heartfelt about the genocide taking place in Kosovo that he volunteered to speak on this issue." Bill expressed his support for the NATO action against the genocidal policies of Milosevic. He said support for this action doesn't mean that we can now trust our rulers to always do the right thing. The rich who run this country have never gone far enough in correcting any social evils, he remarked, and it is strange that much of the so-called Left in

this country is on the side of right-wing Republicans in their opposition to NATO. Bill pointed out that we must find a way to guarantee the lives of Kosovar Muslims along with their right to self-determination. Bill's remarks are the basis for an article on page 10 in this issue in support of the NATO actions. His comments also received applause from many in the crowd.

Before introducing Buzz Doyle, a Gulf War combat vet, to close the event, Barry read a recent quote from Ossie Davis, World War II veteran, actor and social justice activist, in support of the NATO actions: "I accept Veteran's Day and July Fourth as high points of patriotism. Memorial Day is when we remember that we pay the costs for the stupidity of war. ... The necessary wars are as much hell as those that are unnecessary. I watch most closely the faces of the refugees,

particularly the children, so I understand why we are there."

Finally, Buzz stepped to the podium to ask that everyone remember fallen comrades and friends with a moment of silence. He talked about the eleven men he knew and always remembers who were casualties of friendly fire in the Gulf. We all stood quiet for a few minutes, thinking about the people who have been lost in the necessary and unnecessary wars of the past — remembering the dead, while making the commitment to fight like hell for the living!



JOE MILLER IS A NATIONAL COORDINATOR OF VVAW AND A MEMBER OF VVAW'S CHAMPAIGN-URBANA CHAPTER.



Buzz Doyle calls for a moment of silence on Memorial Day.

Widows Of Combat Veterans Forced To Live On \$490 A Month

RAYMOND PARRISH

Widows of combat veterans are forced to live on \$490 a month. This makes you wonder how willing to risk life and limb American combat veterans would have been had they known that their widows were going to be treated this way.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) has a pension program for low-income veterans who served during a period of war. This NSC (non-service connected) Pension will pay to the veteran the difference between their income *from all sources* and an amount that Congress determined to be a livable income.

In 1999 this amount, called the Maximum Annual Income Rate (MAIR), was \$8,778 (\$731.50 per month) for a single

veteran, \$11,497 (958.08 per month) for a veteran with spouse, and \$5,884 (\$490.33 per month) for the surviving spouse. When the veteran dies, his household's income is cut in half, dropping from \$958 to \$490 monthly.

An elderly couple that is able to survive on \$958 per month should be rewarded for their frugality. Instead, when the veteran dies, the survivor not only faces a life without her life-long mate, she is condemned to live in poverty for the rest of that life, having to choose between eating, paying rent or receiving health care.

American GIs who are fighting to prevent genocide by the Serb army think that they will be treated as well as their predecessors,

the GIs who fought against genocide by the Nazis in World War II. Will they be surprised when they talk to these GIs or their widows and discover the truth behind government promises? Will they be distracted by the smoke and mirrors used to fool Congress? Will they see the empty dog-food cans in the widow's trash and assume that there is a dog in the house, or will they know better?

I've been counseling veterans and GIs since 1976. Veterans of all ages and periods of service have one thing in common: disillusionment with their own government for a variety of reasons, from abandoning POW/MIAs to mistreatment of atomic bomb test

and Agent Orange veterans. And, after seeing how the veterans suffering from Gulf War illness have been treated, should anyone be surprised by these pension restrictions? Should anyone wonder why the military is having recruiting troubles? Does anyone care enough about this to write or call their member of Congress? Keep an eye on the headlines to find out.



RAY PARRISH IS A MILITARY COUNSELOR AND MEMBER OF THE CHICAGO CHAPTER OF VVAW.

RESOLUTION ON INCREASING WIDOWS' PENSIONS

WHEREAS a veteran who served during a time of war and is determined by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) to be totally and permanently disabled due to non-service connected disabilities is eligible for a Pension; and

WHEREAS this Pension is based upon financial need with a 1999 "Maximum Annual Income Rate" of \$8778 (\$731.50/month) if single and \$11,497 (\$958.08/month) if married; and

WHEREAS upon the veteran's death the widow/widower will be paid benefits with a "Maximum Annual Income Rate" of \$5884 (\$490.33/month); and

WHEREAS the USDVA Pension program will pay to the claimant the difference between his or her income from all sources and the Maximum Annual Income Rate; and

WHEREAS this means that, at the time of the veteran's death, the survivor's household income is cut almost in half; and

WHEREAS this imposes a severe financial hardship upon the surviving spouse; be it therefore

RESOLVED that the maximum annual income for the surviving spouse on Pension be increased to that which would be payable to a single qualified veteran on Pension.

VVAW encourages chapters, members and friends nation-wide to pass this resolution and act on it.



Ray Parrish speaks at Chicago VVAW's Memorial Day event.



Winter Soldiers An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War by Richard Stacewicz

Winter Soldiers asks why some of the Americans who served in Vietnam returned home to oppose the war. Growing up in the shadows of World War II, these young men volunteered or were drafted as "citizen soldiers." But their patriotic fervor was shaken by the brutal realities of this war. Back in the US they joined the antiwar movement and, as soldiers who had actually fought, they could not be dismissed as draft dodgers. Stacewicz seeks to tell their story by interviewing over thirty members of the VVAW and drawing on their archives, FBI files, and Nixon Administration records.

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Veteran At Urbana High School: Soldier No More

Military Recruiters don't tell the whole story, he maintains

ROBERT DUNN

From *Spin-Off*, the teen section of *Champaign-Urbana's News-Gazette*

In response to the glamorous life that military advertising often depicts, members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War are presenting to young people a different view of military life and alternative jobs and education.

Barry Romo of the Chicago chapter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War spoke late last month to Urbana High School social studies students. He also discussed his experiences in Vietnam and why he came out opposed to the war.

Romo was born to a mixed-race family, his mother having been a British war bride and his father a Mexican. Both taught against racism and brought up their son to be proud of his heritage. His father was a World War II veteran considered a hero by his son. That was one reason Romo chose to enlist. He wanted to be like his father.

Another reason was Romo, a Catholic, had attended a Catholic high school where he says he was fed anti-communist propaganda. He also was told that by serving in Vietnam he would be "saving his Catholic brothers from the new Hitler."

Romo served as a platoon leader in 1967-68 in the Army's 196th Light Infantry Brigade. He received the Bronze Star for ac-

tion in the Tam Ky province. When Romo's nephew was killed in battle during the post-Tet period in 1968, Romo returned to the United States with the nephew's casket. He still had time left to serve; he trained infantry troops at Fort Ord in preparation for their own combat service in Vietnam.

policy in Vietnam.

During a question-and-answer session at the high school, one student asked Romo to describe his most horrifying memory of Vietnam. Romo talked about American soldiers who kicked pregnant Vietnamese women in their stomachs and cut the knee-

Romo said advertisements that glamorize military life are misleading because they don't show the realities of war and boot camp. He said young adults who seek discipline can find it by practicing a martial art rather than joining the service.

And young people who want to serve their country should consider joining Americorps or the Peace Corps, he said. And if people want to learn a technical vocation they might consider technical colleges rather than the military, Romo suggested.

He said young adults should not believe everything military recruiters tell them. Unemployment among young veterans is about 35 percent higher than among non-veterans in the same age group, according to brochures distributed at a counter-recruitment fair held the following day at the Illinois Disciples Foundation.

So Romo said if you want to lose your identity and self-respect and are willing to take another person's life, then by all means enlist.



ROBERT DUNN WILL BE A SENIOR AT URBANA HIGH SCHOOL AND IS A NEW MEMBER OF THE CHAMPAIGN-URBANA CHAPTER OF VVAW.

Romo said advertisements that glamorize military life are misleading because they don't show the realities of war and boot camp.

He later joined the Vietnam Veterans Against the War and spoke out at many demonstrations, demanding an end to the conflict. In 1972, when Romo was a national coordinator for the organization, he traveled to Hanoi in North Vietnam as part of a peace delegation.

During the visit, the delegation spent a good part of its time being protected by the North Vietnamese from the infamous Christmas bombings carried out by B-52s as ordered by President Richard Nixon.

"An equivalent of one nuclear bomb a day was dropped," Romo said. During the bombings, Romo said he started to feel there was a madness behind the U.S.

caps off Vietnamese prisoners of war. He did not address the treatment of American soldiers by the Vietnamese.

Romo told UHS students that the U.S. armed forces dehumanize the enemy to make it easier to kill them. He also talked about the abuse people undergo in boot camp. Romo said officers singled out Asian enlistees, referring to them as "gooks, slant eyes and slopes."

Romo said not only racism but also sexism affects the military. A 1990 Pentagon study showed that two of three women in the military reported having been sexually harassed. One of 20 women reported being raped or sexually assaulted.

Milwaukee Memorial Day

continued from page 1

of Milwaukee addressed the gathering and pledged to support a bill calling for a \$3 billion increase in the VA's budget. He was widely applauded and thanked for his support. Other politician's names were called out, accompanied by jeers from those in attendance.

All participants of the rally were given pre-stamped postcards to send to their legislators. The cards read, "I am writing to express my displeasure with our government's decision to flat-line the VA budget for the next three years. The VA's budget needs to be at minimum increased by \$3 billion to keep pace with the cost of inflation, the increased number of veterans seeking care, and the

type of care required for treatment. If the budget is not revised,

three busloads of disabled veterans from their rooms in the VA Hospital to the VA's cemetery grounds where the Memorial Day ceremonies took place. The disabled vets represented all eras,

those who gave their lives for their country. Music was provided by the American Legion band and a flyover by the Confederate Air Force also took place during the event.

Just before the playing of "Taps," representatives of forty-two different veterans' organizations were called upon to place their wreaths at a monument to those who died in the military. John Lindquist presented VVAW's floral wreath, which had a black banner across the front proclaiming *No War In The Balkans - VVAW*.



DAVE KETTENHOFEN IS A NATIONAL COORDINATOR FOR VVAW AND MEMBER OF THE MILWAUKEE CHAPTER.

Budget restraint must not be at the cost of quality care for veterans.

we will soon see closing of facilities, layoffs of dedicated personnel, reduction in access of services, elimination of services, and erosion of the quality of care. Budget restraint must not be at the cost of quality care for veterans."

On Monday, the Milwaukee Chapter members transported

from W.W.II to Desert Storm. A good rapport was built between them and the VVAW members who volunteered their time.

During the services, veterans and local politicians, including the mayor and county executive, thanked veterans for their sacrifices and paid homage to

Another Brother review

continued from page 3

expectations of and knowledge about America — drastically changed.

Clarence Fitch, like many of us, found himself out of step with places and people who knew little of his too-real recent history. Far too often there was little understanding of it or respect for it or him. Fitch was the kind of urban lumpen proletariat that Marxists used to talk about and Huey Newton recruited: non-middle class in origin, non-college educated but neither stupid or ignorant. Fitch was full of what folks call "mother wit." He both differed from and somewhat matched the stereotype of a "typical" black man.

His childhood, and the family life he had, or didn't have, in a major metropolitan area (New Jersey) shaped him. He got another "upbringing" in the 'Nam. Another when he came back home. And still another as his awareness of himself and politics changed. This happened to many of all colors, castes and conditions. Fitch's life was a work in progress.

When I say politics, I mean interactions among people and institutions as they really are — not as usually seen on TV, taught in schools and pretended or assumed to be. "Another Brother" shows Fitch evolving and self-combusting. The eyes of a daughter, the eyes of a wife, friends and the man himself on trips south of the border meeting people struggling to live their definition of freedom and justice show different aspects of him. People who are much like the ones he once fought. People who are, in essence, like himself.

I easily remember things I found contradictory and confusing while I was in 'Nam. The irony of being 10,000 miles from home and supposedly helping people I'd never seen before and knew little about to preserve their freedom when I knew quite well black folks — and many others — didn't have a full stake or first-class citizenship in America.

'Nam happened while the Clarences in the boonies remembered how things were during their first military training and at the first (or last) duty station they had before 'Nam. My reaction to America from 'Nam when ghettos across the country went up in flames fueled by the social napalm our country dropped on it-

self was "Damn! I'm over here and the war is back there!" I doubt if Clarence's feelings were far from that or much different where he was then.

Not that he, I, or anyone else really knew the exact cause of any particular riot ("rebellion") in a strange city or had a practical way of making things better. But there was a vague and deep "understanding" of what happened and why. And an overcooked resentment. Those "urban disturbances" hurt the people who participated in them, lived close to them or were passers-by, much more than they hurt "the establishment."

In 1968 Martin Luther King was killed, Bobby Kennedy was killed, and in Chicago the police rioted during the Democratic party's national convention. What did Clarence think and feel about

that? Rage? Frustration? Incentive? To do what? How? "Another Brother" shows his efforts to get involved in things, to be fully engaged and fully alive. Again. Or maybe for the first time.

Like the character Nick Romano in Willard Motley's novel, *Knock on Any Door*, Clarence Fitch lived fast, died young, and left a good-looking corpse. Well, mostly. "Another Brother" shows a man blazing, burning and yearning, trying to do a little good to counterbalance... what? I think you know. Being "used and abused" and having had a hand in doing that to others. And being in a hurry about making up for it. Clarence Fitch's life is something to be seen and understood, not judged.

"Another Brother" is full of real people being themselves. And

Fitch himself, full of demons and redemption and development and hope. It's well worth watching. It makes you go "hmmm" when it ends. This documentary, on PBS TV or wherever and however you might watch it, is valuable and full of hard-won knowledge. See it if you can; it's heartfelt and well made. As real as fear and as joyful as laughter.

When the documentary ends, it makes you remember what you always knew: it does make a difference what you do. Things might not always be crystal-clear or come out like you want them to, but you have to try anyway.



HORACE COLEMAN IS A VETERAN,
POET AND WRITER LIVING IN
CALIFORNIA.



Clarence Fitch speaks at VVAW's 20th Anniversary Celebration in New York City, 1987.

An Anti-Genocide Position Is No "Blank Check"!

BILL BRANSON, BARRY ROMO AND JOE MILLER

What, NATO is bombing someone again, and VVAW has not taken a national position? Why do many of us support this NATO action, even with reservations? How can we make sense of the great equivocator, Bill Clinton, taking such action against the Serbs?

We already know that fighting fascists is correct, and we already know that we can't trust our rulers. The bombing must be seen as a long-delayed response to the genocide that has been carried out by Milosevic since the late 1980s. Certainly, there is no more reason to trust the rich in this situation than we had in the Gulf War. The difference here is that we must force them to go as far as necessary.

From Little Rock, to trying rogue cops, to "don't ask, don't tell," the rich have never gone far enough in correcting real social evils. This time, we must say: "You haven't gone far enough!"

VVAW's work concerning problems within Yugoslavia is not new. We have done security and training for the Bosnian Muslims since the early 1990s. We know the history of this region. In fact, it must be said that there is no longer a Yugoslavia, there is only the fascist regime of Milosevic who has used "ethnic cleansing," mass rape and murder as political tools to extend and solidify his power.

Milosevic has just been indicted for his documented slaughter and rape in Bosnia. There he organized the systematic mass rape of 35,000 women, 5,000 of whom were forced to bear Serb children. This is the first known use of such tactics in modern history.

As for Kosovo, we have all seen the satellite photos of mass graves and the smuggled video from the Kosovar Muslims. The heart-rending pictures of hundreds of thousands of refugees, driven like cattle by the Serb army, have

haunted us for weeks. Word from the beleaguered aid workers has now finally begun to come through. There is consistent testimony about massacres, mass rapes, beatings, and burning of villages coming from these refugees. And yet there is disbelief. Why, in the face of so much evidence?

When we watched civil rights workers in the 1950s and 1960s get attacked by police dogs, beaten by cops, and hit with the powerful streams from firehoses, did we disbelieve our eyes then? When we saw television reports of cops attacking anti-war demonstrators during the Vietnam War, did we doubt our eyes and call it all a corporate "plot" to manipulate us? We believed the video of Rodney King being beaten by the L.A. cops. We believed that Abner Louima was raped by New York cops.

In Kosovo, we have seen the evidence of 850,000 "Louimas," yet many refuse to believe the testimony or the photos. Strangely enough, our right-wing political hacks and the bulk of the "left" are linked in their unwillingness to believe the consistent stories from hundreds of thousands of Kosovar refugees.

It is not only the Republican

politicians and the American Legion who are siding with the Serb fascists. Why is it that the outcries of the left and most of the "progressive" media conveniently leave out the pleas of the Kosovars for self-determination? When you see the pictures of Serbs in the rubble, complaining about not being able to access the Internet every day or about how difficult it is to find cigarettes, are these sights followed by an update on the ethnic cleansing? Where are the extensive interviews with survivors of this holocaust?

Why is it that the Republicans, who have supported every military adventure in the last century, are now opposed to any effective attack on Milosevic? There is no oil in Kosovo. The lives of women and children have never really been a concern to the rich. The refugees are Muslims, though of white European descent. And the rich ruling class is split. Many of them support Milosevic as a local "strong man," much as their kind supported Hitler, Mussolini, Marcos, and Pinochet.

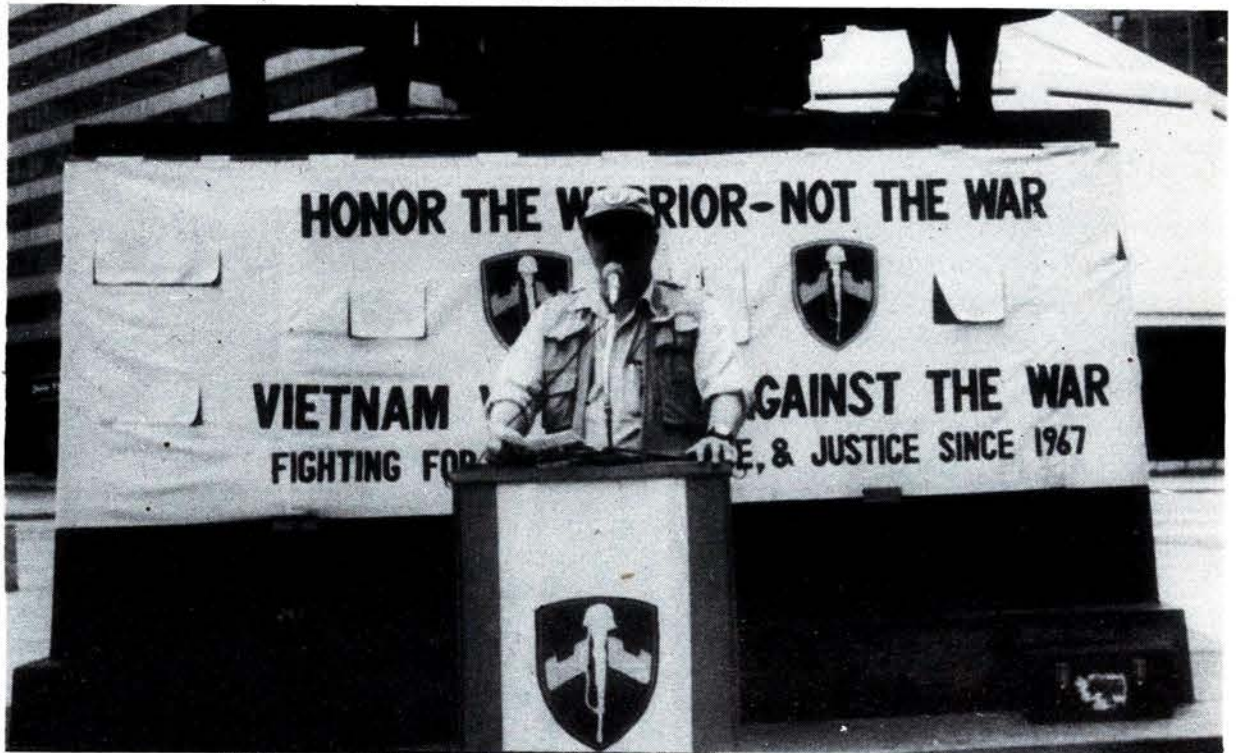
Why is the left out in "right field"? If you don't back the NATO bombing, what are you going to actually do to stop the genocide of the Kosovar people? In the real world Milosevic has already suc-

ceeded in killing or displacing half of the population of Kosovo. If the bombing is stopped without his complete agreement to the NATO demands, he will have a free hand to dispose of the rest of the Kosovars. Are we to abandon the Muslims in 1999 as the Jews were abandoned to the Nazis in the 1930s? The American left has grown accustomed to looking at the position of NATO and, in a knee-jerk response, taking the opposite side. It has failed to analyze the total reality of the current situation. This intellectual bankruptcy is killing the people of Kosovo.

So, what is the solution? We should support the NATO peace plan to stop the genocide immediately. Only then should we stop the bombing. Milosevic must be tried for war crimes without any plea bargains or immunity. If the Serb people fail to string him up by his ankles like Mussolini, then someone else should do it for them. Finally, we should support self-determination for Kosovo and back it up with massive military force.



BILL BRANSON, BARRY ROMO AND JOE MILLER ARE ALL PART OF VVAW'S NATIONAL OFFICE.



Bill Branson delivers anti-genocide speech on Memorial Day in Chicago.



VVAW Memorial Day event, Chicago.

Stop The Bombing

DAVE KETTENHOFEN AND JOHN LINDQUIST

VVAW has a proud history of opposing wars, and we feel this new war in the Balkans shouldn't be any different. VVAW should oppose the U.S./NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, it should oppose the ethnic cleansing of the Albanians by the Serbs, and under no circumstances should it support the introduction of U.S. combat ground troops.

History usually plays a great part in understanding why wars break out in certain areas. Our total lack of understanding of the history of Vietnam helped our country make the decisions it made in the 1950s and 1960s. Our lack of knowledge of the Balkans should not allow us to make the same mistakes in the 1990s.

Our country and NATO are violating international laws in attacking Serbia over Kosovo, which is part of the sovereign independent state of Yugoslavia. It is a violation of Article 2 of the United Nations Charter that prohibits the use of force against a sovereign state where it has not attacked another state outside its borders. If this issue had been submitted to the UN Security Council, it most likely would have been vetoed. NATO knows this and therefore has bypassed the Security Council.

It is a violation of NATO's charter. No member of NATO was attacked, so how can this "defensive organization" act? The so-called Rambouillet agreement is a

violation of the 1980 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, which prohibits the use of coercion and force to compel any state to sign a treaty or agreement. Yugoslavia was being asked to sign or be bombed. If the result of the bombing is recognition of Kosovo as an independent state, it will be a violation of international law that prohibits the recognition of provinces that unilaterally declare independence against the

the guerrilla war against the Nazis. These blood feuds go back over five hundred years, fighting the Ottoman and Austria-Hungarian empires. The State Department has reported that 2,000 ethnic Albanians were killed in Kosovo during the past year. In the same period 1,300 Serbians were killed. We should not pick sides here.

We don't bomb Turkey for the Kurds. We don't bomb En-

waited far too long to make our position known about this war. Our long delay sends the message that we condone the bombing of Yugoslavia and the future use of ground troops. Bombing the Serbs as "payback" for atrocities committed against the Albanians has only served to further escalate the cycle of atrocities. The U.S./NATO slaughter of Kosovar refugees and Serbian civilians and the destruction of Yugoslavia's in-

frastructure is an atrocity! This is not a question of taking a position on events in which the U.S. is not directly involved. These are our bombs, this is our military, and these are our tax dollars at work. We supposedly have a voice in what our country does; the blood is on our hands. War is not the answer.

VVAW's position should be: (1) Stop the bombing, no war in the Balkans. (2) Ethnic cleansing and violence on both sides must stop.

(3) The needs of the refugees, especially the volume of people since the bombing began, must be met. (4) This whole big mess must be settled by negotiations using the UN.



DAVE KETTENHOFEN IS A VVAW NATIONAL COORDINATOR FROM MILWAUKEE AND JOHN LINDQUIST IS COORDINATOR OF THE MILWAUKEE CHAPTER.



Veterans' cemetery in Wisconsin.

wishes of the federal authorities.

This position of opposing the bombing does not condone ethnic cleansing, Serbian atrocities or war crimes. There are Serbs guilty of these crimes. But ethnic cleansing has taken place on all sides in the Balkans. Six hundred thousand Serbs were cleansed out of Croatia in 1995. Tens of thousands on both sides were cleansed in Bosnia. Albania, with Kosovo adjoined to it, sided with Nazi Germany in W.W.II and committed mass killings and cleansings of Serbs. Only the Serbs fought

gland because of Northern Ireland. We don't bomb Indonesia because of Timor. The list goes on. Why do we choose to bomb in Yugoslavia?

Last, but not least, let's not forget the impending new round of disabled veterans. Our government sure did a lot to help the atomic vets. We know how much help Agent Orange vets received. Gulf War Syndrome vets are still fighting for their benefits. A possible big, long war in the Balkans will overwhelm the VA.

We, as an organization, have



Participants gather at VVAW Memorial Day event in Chicago.

Kicking Down the Walls and Fences

CLAUDIA LENNHOF

Speech delivered at VVAW Memorial Day Event in Chicago May 31, 1999

My name is Claudia Lennhoff, and I am a member of the VVAW chapter in Champaign. I am also the director and lead organizer for the Champaign County Health Care Consumers.

CCHCC is a 22 year old non-profit grassroots citizen action organization. We are founded on the belief that health care is a basic human right, and that everyone should have access to quality affordable health care. We support the struggle for universal health care.

We also believe that meaningful change in the health care system will only come through the active involvement of consumers. In order to fight injustice in the health care system, we organize on the local level in Champaign County.

Let me start by saying that our nation's health care system pisses me off.

Health care is a major social problem in this country. But when we talk about health care, and people's lack of access to health care, we have to remember that we are talking about a so-called social problem for which the infrastructure already exists!

With rare exceptions, we have plenty of hospitals and clinics and professionals to provide health care to our nation's population. The barriers to access are not structural, they are not cement and steel — they are political and economic.

We have artificially created categories of people who do not have access to health care, or have limited access. We have the underinsured and the uninsured. (I might also add that now we have the veterans.)

Why do we even need insurance? We need insurance because we don't have a universal health system like all other industrialized nations in the world! And we have powerful corporate interests who have commodified a basic human right — health and healing.

We have a corporate and privatized health care system, and a government that not only allows it, but encourages it, and elected

officials who profit from it.

While our government turns its back on the people and claims no responsibility for the ravages of this system, elected officials enjoy, for a lifetime, the best health care anyone can get in this country.

Let me give you an example of a struggle we are fighting in Champaign County right now. We've called upon the government to help us, and the response has been deafening.

We have a 14 year old community program which was created by the Champaign County Health Care Consumers in coop-

eration with a local hospital, to waive out of pocket hospital expenses for low-income Medicare patients.

Recently, a huge corporation called Provena Health System, bought out our local hospital which was involved in this program. In November last year, Provena canceled the program without warning, and dumped the 1100 low-income seniors and disabled members from the program.

These poor people no longer have access to affordable health care. Many of our members are veterans who have limited access to VA's in other towns, the closest of which is 45 minutes away.

When Provena dumped the seniors from this program, their excuse was that the program was illegal and they feared federal government prosecution. We know that the program is perfectly legal and complies with federal regulations. We have asked the federal government to come to our community to show support for the program, and to not allow Provena to use the government as an excuse for canceling this very important program.

Senator Durbin's office and the Health Care Finance Admin-

istration have been reluctant to take a stand and have refused to come to our community. They don't want to appear to "be taking sides."

Heaven forbid that we ask the government to be on the side of the low-income, sick, elderly and disabled! I have been told by Senator Durbin's office that there are two constituencies in this case, the corporation, and the people!

Well, the people are organizing to save this program, and we are targeting the Provena corporation and the government that has abandoned our community. And I'm telling you, we will win

this struggle! This struggle about our local program is really a struggle about corporate accountability and government responsibility in health care.

Because we have a corporate and privatized health care system, people are dying in the streets outside hospitals that are denying them access, denying them entrance because they don't have enough money or proof of insurance. You all know these sad and disgusting stories.

Our nation's health care system has been inadequate for a long time, and the government knows it. That is part of the reason that the federal government created the Veterans Administration Hospitals to take care of veterans' health care needs.

But the same government that has allowed our nation's health care system to disintegrate into a gated community of providers allowing only the most fortunate and privileged, is also the master engineer who is now ravishing and dismantling the VA system and health benefits for veterans.

I am not an expert on health care for veterans, or on the Veterans Administration hospital sys-

tem, but it is plain to see that the government is looking for a way out of providing decent health care for veterans. Once again, the government is abdicating responsibility for its people's health, and once again, the government is sacrificing veterans.

Right now, the federal government is downsizing veterans' health care. They are working to close VA hospitals. They say the hospitals are too costly to maintain. The government has ended in-patient substance abuse programs at the VA. They have restricted services to nearly all veterans with disability ratings of

50% or less. Meanwhile, we also have personnel in the VA system who are rewarded for denying certain diagnoses, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. These same personnel often under-rate the veterans' disability level, and thereby close them out of receiving services. And many veterans, because of income, homelessness, and other factors, cannot get access to the non-VA health care

system.

It's depressing and disgusting. How do we kick down the walls and fences of this gated community called the health care system? How do we hope to do this?

I believe that hope can be realized through organizing and struggling together for change, for social justice. I believe that younger generations learn from older generations of activists and organizers, and from their struggles against injustice, and that younger and older generations join in struggle together.

I am an organizer because older generations of social justice activists took stands on issues of justice and showed me the importance of collective struggle, and showed me a truth that my public education tried to conceal from me: activism is a lifetime habit, not a phase you outgrow, and organizing works.

From these activists, I also unlearned the myth that people act only in their self-interest. In its place, I learned the truth that a commitment to justice unites people across boundaries of na-

continued on next page



Claudia Lennhoff and Ralph Nader at CCHCC press conference.

Vietnam Vet Says He'll Fight Library's Use Of Memorial Center

MICHAEL Y. PARK

Reprinted from
The Jersey Journal
Monday, April 12, 1999

Veteran David Cline says it's a war he never wanted. But when he heard the Zabriskie Street branch of the Jersey City Public Library might move into the Vietnam Veteran Memorial Center for six months, he sounded the call to arms.

"The bottom line is, if we have to, we'll go out and picket because it's wrong," he said last week. "The people of Jersey City will know that the Jersey City Vietnam vets don't like what they're doing."

Because long-needed major renovation at the Zabriskie Street library will shut the building down for six months starting in June, a makeshift library will take its place. After consulting with the Friends of the Zabriskie Street Library — a small, loosely organized group of library supporters — the library decided the best plan was to move it to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Center in nearby Pershing Field, library board President Ervin Haynes said.

Although it bears the name of the Jersey City sons killed in the Vietnam War, the city-owned center is regularly rented out to block associations, sports leagues and Alcoholics Anonymous,

among others.

Putting a library in there means the other groups won't be able to use it, Cline says, especially because it's only meant to hold up to 109 people and is basically one room with attached bathrooms.

"Putting a library in there means restricting its use for all the

once a week during the day, hours before most groups schedule their meetings.

Cline remained skeptical.

"If you put books in there, you'll have people in each other's armpits," he said. "And once you get a library in there, they're going to say, 'Why not put in this for six months?' and then, 'Why not a

have say over who goes in there," he said. "You know what alternative he suggested? Sending kids who use the library all the way over to Five Corners library. Now that's a terrible injustice for these little kids, who are often latch-key kids. We're dealing with babies."

Gaughan, Haynes and the Friends didn't seem to agree entirely on how firm the plan was.

"I'm going to sit personally with any group that meets there, and if there is a problem, I'll find (the group) an alternate place to meet," Gaughan said. "If the center is too small, we will have to find another site, but that's the plan for now."

But Monya McCarty, a spokesman for the Friends, said the center is only one possibility. Another centrally located site that could be used might be the first floor of the Jersey City Parking Authority.

Haynes said it's out of his hands.

"We want to sit down with (the groups that use the site) and see what can be worked out," he said. "But basically this is the decision the council and people at the Heights (the Friends) have made, so I have to defer to them. If they decide that becomes a problem, we'll look elsewhere."



"As a Vietnam veterans group we think it should be respected as a memorial..."

community groups that use it during the week," said Cline, president of the Jersey City Vietnam Veterans Memorial Committee.

Herbert C. Huels, president of the Pershing Field Neighborhood Association, agreed.

"They call it temporary, but it's permanent as far as I'm concerned," he said. "The people using it now are either put out or handicapped if the library uses it. It's not a big place."

Because the temporary library would only take up "a couple of feet of wall space and some tables," Haynes said the library and other groups who use the building should be able to coexist peacefully. And Ward D Councilman William A. Gaughan said that the library would only be open

police station?"

But there's more to it than elbow room, Cline said.

"That's the only Vietnam memorial in Jersey City," said Cline, who earned a Bronze Star and three Purple Heart medals. "That's the only thing we have."

"As a Vietnam veterans group, we think it should be respected as a memorial. But I had to hear it through the grapevine, and then I was told it was a fait accompli until we started bitching. It's like we're good enough to use to put our names on the building, but when they have got to put a library in there, forget us."

Gaughan said Cline isn't considering other viewpoints.

"The vets' group seem to think it's their building and they

Kicking Down the Walls and Fences

continued from page 12

tionality, age, race, class, sex, and disability status.

From these activists and organizers, I have also learned that organizing is fun. It is fun to kick ass and to right the wrongs of this world! It is fun to be on the side of justice! And struggling in solidarity is always a reason for a good party.

These activists and organizers from whom I learned were VVAW members. Now, I am proud to be a VVAW member.

VVAW says that we should honor the dead and fight like hell for the living. And I say that we honor the dead by fighting like hell for the living. No one should have to be a casualty of a callous, cruel, immoral, and unjust health care system and the government that allows and encourages it.

I want to say thanks to all of you who have spoken out and organized throughout the decades on different issues. Sometimes, I know, you don't know if you are making a difference or not. But I'm here to tell you, you have made a difference, and there are new generations of social justice activists and organizers who have made the commitment to join the

struggle against injustice, and to struggle in solidarity with veterans and their families.

I am a Texan, and therefore, I'd like to close by quoting one of my favorite Texans, a great woman named Molly Ivins. She says,

"So keep fightin' for freedom and justice, beloveds, but don't you forget to have fun doin' it. Lord, let your laughter ring forth. Be outrageous, ridicule the fraidy-cats, rejoice in all the oddi-

ties that freedom can produce. And when you get through kickin' ass and celebratin' the sheer joy of a good fight, be sure to tell those who come after how much fun it was."

Thank you.



CLAUDIA LENNHOF IS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CCHCC AND A MEMBER OF THE C-U VVAW CHAPTER.

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Vietnamese-American Peace Projects

GLENN CLARK

At a Madison Friends (Quaker) Monthly Meeting in March 1994, Mike Boehm, a Vietnam veteran, described a peace park for healing and reconciliation that American and Vietnamese veterans wanted to build near Hanoi. The park was to be patterned after the dove mound at the Wisconsin veterans' memorial park near Neillsville. This dove mound, designed by Vietnam veteran David Giffy after similar Native American mounds in Wisconsin, was dedicated in 1989 to Americans listed as missing after the Vietnam War ended. The idea of a peace park dedicated to "all the missing" — Vietnamese and American — originated in 1990 when a Vietnamese veteran, Nguyen Noc Hung, was taken to the dove mound in Neillsville. Hung was very moved when told about the mound and lit an incense stick and said prayers for his brother, one of 300,000 Vietnamese "missing" when the war ended.

The Vietnamese-American Peace Park Committee, formed as a subcommittee of Madison Monthly Meeting's Peace and Social Concerns Committee, raised money for the peace park in Vietnam. A ground breaking ceremony took place on May 11, 1995, and the dedication ceremony was held on November 11, 1995, at the Peace Park site near Song Mai Village (Bac Giang township, Ha Bac province) about 35 miles north of Hanoi. Betty Boardman and I from Madison Meeting attended the dedication ceremony and planted trees.

During the Vietnam War, Betty was a peace activist and sailed aboard the Phoenix, delivering hospital supplies to North Vietnam. I was a helicopter pilot, flying 1,914 hours combat flight time during a year and a half tour of duty. We came from opposite poles of the American experience during the war, and the premise of peace and reconciliation was tested. I found the dedication healing and now consider Betty to be my friend.

The Peace Park Committee has changed its name to Vietnamese-American Peace Projects, American Chapter and is now raising funds for a peace park in My Lai that was dedicated on March 16, 1998. Ongoing projects we are raising funds for include:

1. Completion of the 25-acre Peace Park in the village of Song Mai, part of the town of Bac Giang, in Ha Bac province near Hanoi. Eventually this park is to be self-supporting through the sale of fruit from hillside trees and fish from a reflecting pool at the base of the hill. Money is needed to deepen the well, replace trees that died during a drought, and put up cement utility poles to bring electricity to the top of the hill.

2. Completion of a second peace park in My Lai. Villagers from My Lai, after learning of the Peace Park in Bac Giang, thought a park for healing and reconciliation would be a good thing for their village. This park will also be designed to provide some income through the products of its fruit trees and fish pond, and from tourism.

3. Enlargement of the My

Lai revolving loan fund. Established in 1993 and administered by the Vietnam Women's Union, this fund loans money without collateral to very poor women (mostly war widows) in the My Lai area. Those who borrow the money can invest it in such activities as raising shrimp, pigs and cows; processing cassava flour; making fishing nets, baskets and mats; and planting and selling flowers. Money is paid back by the borrowers from the proceeds of their investments and then loaned out again.

4. Enlargement of the two-room school for elementary students who are now meeting half-days in a rice warehouse.

5. Provision of two sterilizers, one for the clinic in Bac Giang, and the other for the village in My Lai.

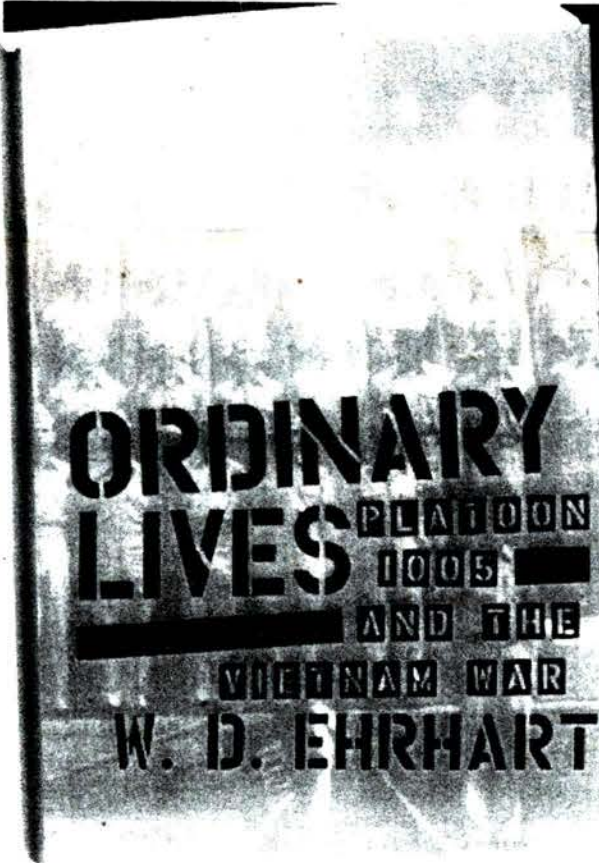
It is very difficult to say "no" when there is so much need. We are a small grassroots organization, and John Zutz with the "Blessing of the Bock" is our largest single donor. We are deeply indebted to John, his wife Edie, and all the volunteers at the "Blessing of the Bock."

Tax-deductible contributions may be made by sending checks to:

Madison Friends
Vietnamese Peace Projects
1704 Roberts Court
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Thank you very much for your time and your help.






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**who did not think they were
doing anything extraordinary
when they risked, and often
lost, their lives just because their country
asked them to. After the war the survivors
silently went back to work, often at low-paying,
non-establishment jobs for an establishment
that never even said thanks. Ehrhart, by giving
'just the facts,' says thanks admirably."**

-George C. Wilson,
author of *Mud Soldiers* and *Supercarrier*,
and former military correspondent for
The Washington Post



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Seizing the Statue of Liberty 1971 Three Days With A Lady

DON BRISTOW-CARRICO

I was on a VVAW operation at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania during Christmas break of 1971. I went down from Massachusetts with a bunch of vets. I was busy working in the kitchen helping to feed everyone, as I had done on our march from Concord to Bunker Hill the previous fall.

During the night, a friend of mine from the Cambridge office took me to a big tent that contained a number of vets sitting in a semicircle. A few more came in, and we were asked to be quiet. Two vets from New Jersey started showing pictures of the Statue of Liberty and talking about taking her over as a protest. We were all sworn to secrecy and given the option to leave, but I, along with most of the others, chose to stay.

The next morning I boarded a van with a few of my Massachusetts brothers and Vin Maclellan from *The Boston Phoenix*, and set off for the "Lady." I asked Vin what he thought we would accomplish in terms of media coverage. He said that we would probably be arrested in fifteen minutes and it might make page nine of the *Times* if we were lucky. We arrived at the ferry terminal having been briefed on what we were going to do next. We went in two or three different boats so as not to be too obvious, and we dressed in civvies so that we would blend in better.

I took a recon on the island and found a huge column in the base that I could hide behind. I looked around and saw another brother behind the next column with his hand up to his mouth giving me the quiet sign, so I acknowledged him, sat down and waited. I could hear people going

by on the tour only feet away from me. Peeking from behind the column I could see the spiral staircase practically above me. Finally, I saw a group come down followed by a female park ranger. I noticed some of the brothers that were in the tent were in the group. I thought for sure it was all over before it even started, but I hunkered down and waited for them to find me.

After a while it got very quiet and the lights started to go out.

City Police showed up, but not before the *New York Times* arrived on a rented barge. The police told us that they had no jurisdiction on the island since it is a national park, but they did ask us to leave. We had set up phone communication between the island and the New York office of VVAW. When we took count there were fifteen vets and one radio disc jockey from an underground New York station.

We ended up staying for three

minutes, we didn't have any demands. We only had a statement that said "we support anyone who refuses to fight" — in hopes of extending the Christmas ceasefire. The press was hungry for more information, but that was all we had. One person from the New York office claimed that we would stay until the war ended. No thanks, not me. We were told that the National Parks Service was mobilizing in DC and would be up in two days. Our lawyers told us we could stay and get arrested or walk out free. They felt that we had milked the press as much as we could and it would end up costing a lot to defend the "Liberty Fifteen."

We walked out to a press conference and a good meal and then crawled back into obscurity. An interesting sidelight was that the disc jockey just walked out with the lawyers during one of their sessions and the authorities didn't have a clue. We had also barricaded the doors from the inside, and it looked very fortified, but the doors opened outward. If they had tried to come in after us, the barricade would have fallen easily.

We all received Christmas cards from John and Yoko. I lost mine, as well as a lot of VVAW memorabilia, in a fire.



DON BRISTOW-CARRICO WAS MEMBER OF THE CAMBRIDGE MA VVAW CHAPTER. HE CURRENTLY RESIDES IN MAINE.



Wow, we made it! We had agreed to meet at the main desk area at the bottom. When we met each other we were all very excited and shared how we had hidden. Some had been hiding in the arm. They pulled the grate back and crawled in. I heard someone running toward us saying that a man with a flashlight had seen him, dropped the flashlight and ran. As the man left he opened up a door to the employees' lounge that we didn't even know about. This would prove vital later.

The man must have called the police, because the New York

days eating food we found in the lounge refrigerator. I suggested that we leave them some money for the food, and we left a note to the National Parks staff on the blackboard thanking them for the accommodations. We had turned all the American flags upside down as a distress symbol. A reporter from France told us that if we took a flag up to the head he would get it in every paper in the world. We put it up there and he did it! He rented a helicopter and got a great shot.

Since we had only expected to be at the "Lady" for a few

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From Vietnam to Alabama "Special Agents"

DAVID CURRY

August 1971 marked a crucial month in what would become the longest war in U.S. history. The Nixon doctrine of Vietnamization was replacing the failed Kennedy-Johnson doctrine of "winning hearts and minds." For the American people, the war seemed to have dragged on interminably or been forgotten. That past spring, anti-war demonstrators including Vietnam Veterans Against the War had brought the nation's capital to a halt, more than once. In the coming fall, mutinying GIs would just as frequently bring parts of the war to a halt. Attica had happened. George Jackson was killed allegedly attempting to escape from prison. It was a month in my life when I would be personally involved in one of the many personal confrontations between individuals that would ultimately connect into the Vietnam experience.

The confrontation was between a freshly promoted captain in one of the "cush" jobs in the war and a private with one of the worst assignments in a war full of bad assignments.

The private had only a few months before been a civilian. As a community college student, his activities varied as much as his interests. One day, he'd joined a friend in passing out leaflets in support of Black Panthers who were on trial. Most days, though, he just hung out with one or more of his close friends. They drove around a lot, ate fast food, and, being without an identifiable girl-

friend, may have dreamed of the possibility or an opportunity. All this, and more, was in the thick FBI file that had arrived on the captain's desk. The report included a thorough background check on the pamphlet. It had been printed on a Progressive Labor Party press. The pamphlet had denounced the U.S. system of justice, capitalism, and imperialism including the war in Vietnam.

Along with surveillance reports and official records checks on the student pamphleteer, the file being read by the captain also included an interview transcript in which the FBI had approached the student with an opportunity to

file described efforts by military intelligence agents in cooperation with the FBI to recruit the newly made private into undercover service within the military stateside. After all, these agents could effectively make the case that a private with no security clearance might end up in the worst of assignments in Vietnam. The private had continued to quietly refuse to cooperate.

There was little information in the file about what the private without a security clearance had been doing at the fire base just a few miles outside An Khe in Binh Dinh province. But one of the captain's colleagues jokingly

Still standing by his temporary bunk, the private spoke softly, but clearly. "I will not answer any of your questions, sir."

"cooperate fully" with the agency's ongoing investigations of anti-American activities by radical organizations. Offered a chance to be of service to his country as an undercover informant, the private-to-be politely refused. The report also contained copies of the selective service records facilitating the conscription of the fledgling radical into the U.S. Army. All of these pages were, of course, sanctified with the official stamp "SECRET." A second set of interview transcripts in the

speculated it wasn't much more than burning shit and dodging sniper rounds.

The captain and his counter-intelligence unit moved and lived with fabricated civilian identities in the variety of places covered by John Paul Vann's II Corps headquarters command. The team of agents discussed the best way to turn the recalcitrant young private into an asset for the good of the nation. Ultimately, they decided that the former resort city of Nha Trang would be the best location



Off to DC demo, 1974.

for the interview.

Orders were sent and the unknowing private was ordered to report to the temporary barracks at II Corps headquarters in the compound of the Grand Hotel in Nha Trang. From the compound, the private could see, hear, and smell one of the most beautiful beaches in the South China Sea. A military intelligence clerk, himself wearing a Hawaiian shirt and a civilian identity, greeted the private and made sure he knew how to get to the base PX while he waited, still without information, to see what would happen next.

As the clerk informed the captain and the other agents on the detail, the private must be enjoying himself. For example, he had been able to receive most of his six months of mail and packages from home that had been delayed there at headquarters. The plan was, of course, to give him a maximum taste of the good life that his stubbornness had forced him to leave behind.

On the third day, it was decided that the two best interviewers from the detachment would surprise the private with the subject interview. They knew he was taking a nap in the empty barracks after lunch. The two agents were able to walk right up to his bunk before they called him to attention.

Swinging down from the top bunk, the private looked amazingly clean-cut for an enlisted grunt in Vietnam. His nineteen-year-old face was bespeckled by acne that the captain was glad had finally started to leave his own twenty-two-year-old face. The captain told the private to be at ease, but there was no way that the private could guess the ranks of these men who quickly flashed badges and credentials and identified themselves as "special agents." Both agents wore neatly pressed civilian clothes, visible



Being taken off in a VVAW ambulance after being beaten by cops.

continued on next page

Growing Up With the Military Born To Kill Commies

JOHN MILLER

November 8, 1976. Francis E. Warren Air Force Base, Cheyenne, Wyoming. This time and place would mark the birth of what some refer to as the "Air Force Brat," and what others might call a born and bred commie-killer. Actually, it's the time and place of my birth, a day that all communists would come to fear.

When I was young, my father worked in simulator programs, and this sparked my interest in flying and planes. It was at this time that I started to think about possibly being a pilot of some sort. Later, my father began working on the F-16 program, one that would eventually prove quite lucrative not only to the United States, but to other countries like Turkey and Israel. At the time, however, I had yet to grasp the concept that these sorts of relationships could have potentially negative repercussions. My lack of knowledge (I was only a kid for Pete's sake) in the areas of politics, imperialism and colonialism hindered me from seeing the "us" and "them" dichotomy that was forming in my mind.

Television played a vital role in the shaping of my psyche, and further embedded these ideas. My father's position in the Air Force was just as influential, as I had access to many a cool picture of

fighters, bombers, and the ordinance that they could potentially carry. Who wants a picture of a commercial liner unless it can carry cluster bombs and sidewinders? This exposure, as well as my interest in drawing, led me down an interesting path. Not only did I begin drawing such things, but I started to add some commentary to make them seem a bit more

Living on or near the bases, and therefore being constantly surrounded by and immersed in such an environment, it is difficult not to buy into at least some aspects of that way of thinking. As a result I adopted a general dislike, and furthermore a great distrust, of those Others.

Fortunately, one of those Others would become a close

visible to me, and unfortunately the former would materialize as a fist in my stomach.

As my general knowledge increased, I began to question such ideology more generally, but some aspects were harder to shake than others. I always had a feeling that Vietnam was wrong, and I believe that this was a result of media portrayals as well as the manner in which my father would refer to it only in a negative, regrettable tone. Now my involvement in and support for organizations such as the Progressive Resource/Action Cooperative and Vietnam Veterans Against the War allows me to continue critically interrogating my past, as well as the past and dominant ideologies of this country.

These organizations as well as my schooling have allowed me to see things that I have been blinded to in the past, and that is greatly appreciated. No more do I look forward to killing "commies." Upon looking back I could regret such a thought, but instead I look forward with social justice and its greater struggle in mind.



JOHN MILLER IS A MEMBER OF THE PROGRESSIVE RESOURCE/ACTION COOPERATIVE AND SOON TO BE A UNION ORGANIZER IN CHICAGO.

Television played a vital role in the shaping of my psyche, and further embedded these ideas.

realistic.

This commentary, of course, was most often directed at communists and Middle-Eastern "terrorists." Buying into the Cold War military ideology, my drawings appeared to be from some sort of strange McCarthy-esque children's book tentatively titled "Kids Draw Commies." For instance, I would draw a picture of an American fleet of bombers destroying a Russian submarine accompanied by lines like "Die Gorby Die!!" After watching movies about crazed Libyans and Soviet invasions of North America, one begins to internalize such images.

friend and aid in the reversal of my earlier misconceptions. His name was Sahem, and he was from Jordan. Hailing from this country, however, he could very well have been a figure running from a laser-guided bomb I had just launched from my very own F-16. It was soon after this meeting that I began to question the stereotypes I had always encountered. Also helpful was the environment in which I attended junior high and high school. They had become much more diverse, racially, ethnically, and economically, and this exposure proved invaluable. It was at this point that racism and classism became most

"Special Agents"

continued from previous page

holstered thirty-eights, and glaring expressions to match. The captain thought the private was lucky not knowing that the older and larger agent was really an E-6 who routinely boasted how in his former duties as a stateside military policeman he had already killed two misguided GIs in the line of duty and was always ready to kill a third. The older agent informed the private that the agents had a few questions for him, but, keeping with standard operating procedure, that he had the right to refuse to answer any of the questions. Still standing by his temporary bunk, the private spoke softly, but clearly. "I will not answer any of your questions, sir." Taken aback, the captain said, "In that case, that will be all, private." And without any show of emotion, the special agents walked out of the barracks. Within an

hour, the clerk in the Hawaiian shirt returned to get the private on his way back to his fire base by nightfall.

In the fall of 1972, the fire base where the private was assigned was one of the several locations where GIs refused to go on patrols. It was a base where officers and NCOs were fraged. Before the end of the fall of 1972, the new policy that U.S. troops would no longer go on routine patrols was invoked.

I don't know what part that "radical" private may have played in those actions, because I was elsewhere. With his simple courage, the young private had sapped away a little more of my rapidly fading enthusiasm for the war. Within a week, I wrote a letter resigning from active duty. I received a response from the Assistant Secretary of the Army ac-

cepting my resignation contingent on my completing my tour in Vietnam. The II Corps headquarters military intelligence detachment "stood down" in the next months, and I was transferred to the Special Operations Battalion in Saigon to finish my tour. On the day that I was released from active duty, I found a phone number and called Vietnam Veterans Against the War from the San Francisco airport.

Almost ten years later, my being a captain in counterintelligence was on the other side of several years of anti-war and civil rights activism. I was being targeted by one of the first major investigations of radical vets in Alabama under the Reagan administration. I met my lawyer at a coffee shop in Mobile, Alabama, across the street from another coffee shop where my scheduled interview with special agents representing the FBI, the Alabama

Bureau of Investigation, the DEA, and the Veterans Administration was to take place. Even having my friend and lawyer by my side, my fear at facing those stern agents of the state was considerable. It made me wonder how much more courage it had taken for a nineteen-year-old private standing alone, facing a return to six more months of potential harm, to face such men. But in my case, at least, that private had taught me how to answer the first question that I was asked.



DAVID CURRY IS A STAFF MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL OFFICE OF VVAW, AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI, AND AUTHOR OF SUNSHINE PATRIOTS: PUNISHMENT AND THE VIETNAM OFFENDER AND CO-AUTHOR OF CONFRONTING GANGS: CRIME AND COMMUNITY.

The Illinois National Guard

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ers. Our first tour of duty took us to the southeast side of Chicago. I had a roving patrol on 63rd Street from Stoney Island to Cottage Grove, under the "El" tracks. Besides the looting that was taking place, which the police mostly handled, the sound of gunfire in the air just shook you to the bones. You had no idea from where these shots were being fired. Though our presence was pretty much a show of force, there were times when we had to dismount and control a group of potential rioters and keep the crowd levels to a minimum. We were on continuous duty for a total of seven days, with most of our time spent on the south side of Chicago, sleeping on the floors of the Sears store or the dime store, or wherever there was a convenient place to take a

Some homes could hardly be called homes. It was as though everyone lived on the streets and only slept in their homes.

It was fortunate that I worked for a company that accepted my obligation. I had heard from others that although they couldn't get fired, life was not all that great.

Then came August and the Democratic National Convention. Things were happening in downtown Chicago that didn't affect me, but were interesting to read about. That was until the police and the hippies got into it with each other. So here it was: another tour of duty with Governor Kerner's Rent-A-Guard. It was at this time that my wife was pregnant with our daughter, Jill — and very close to her delivery date.



truck and on we went to Soldiers Field parking lot.

As soon as we arrived at Soldiers Field we were called out to turn back a crowd that was coming down Michigan Avenue. That was a real interesting situation; there

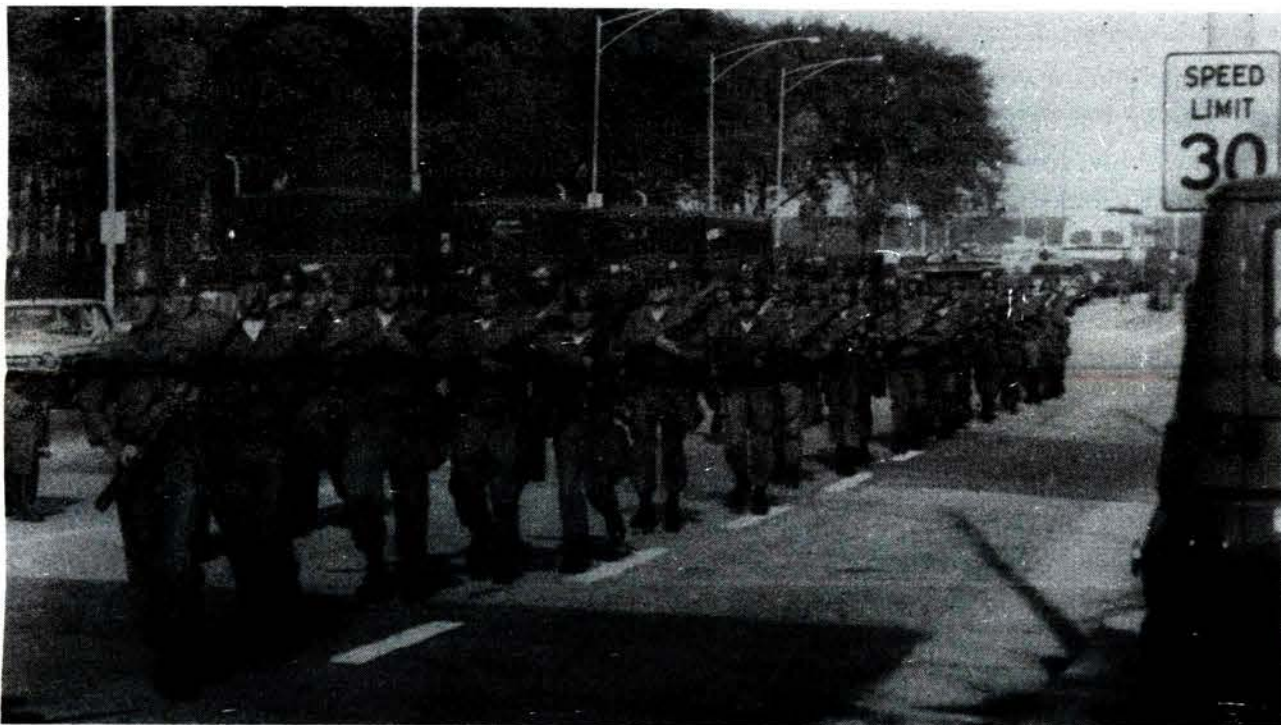
held. Our job throughout this encounter was nothing more than to keep the crowds in an area and off the streets. The Chicago police handled any disturbances. No one was allowed behind the perimeter lines we set up. If they crossed (a few did, including reporters), they received the sting from the police. In our area of responsibility we were not on what was considered the "front line."

The rest of 1968 turned out to be much better. With the de-escalation of the Vietnam War, we were taken off our two weekends a month and put on one weekend. It was great to know that we no longer might have to go to Vietnam.

My obligation to the Guard ended in 1969, after serving in ten types of disturbances. It was a great way to go out: no riots, no tornadoes, no conventions, no weekends away from home.



BILL MACHOTA IS EMPLOYED BY ROTEC INDUSTRIES, A CONSTRUCTION EQUIPMENT MANUFACTURER. HE CURRENTLY RESIDES IN NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS.



rest. The food and accommodations were marvelous!

Just before the seventh day, we were relieved of duty by the regular U.S. Army troops. They were really happy to be there — a lot of these guys had just gotten back from Vietnam, thought they were going to be winding down — and here they were, in the midst of more gunfire! So, we left the friendly confines of the south side of Chicago and were instructed to go to the west side of Chicago where there was much more happening in the way of burning buildings, more looting and more gunfire. Since we were on a roving patrol, it took us through all the smaller internal areas of the west side of Chicago. It was not a pretty sight. It was hard to imagine, given the way we were brought up, that people actually could live and survive in this type of environment. Poverty reigned supreme.

Well, that morning, things started to happen with her, and I got a call from the Guard saying, "Okay, boy, get down here," and my wife was telling me, "I'm going to have the baby — let's go to the hospital." Of course, family comes first, so I called the first sergeant and said, "As soon as my wife has the baby and everybody is fine, I'll see you there."

That afternoon, after my daughter was born and after being assured that everybody was fine and in good health, I made the trek down to the Chicago Avenue Armory. I had been told earlier that there was nothing really happening with our unit — that we were just on standby and waiting to see if we were going to get called out or be released. Well, by the time I arrived at the armory, they were deploying the whole unit to head out to the Grant Park area, so I grabbed my gear, threw it in a

we were, in the middle of beautiful downtown Chicago, dismounting on Michigan Avenue and ducking ashtrays and bags of shit thrown from the hotel windows. This tour lasted up through the night of the Democratic convention when the march took place from Grant Park all the way to the Chicago Amphitheater, where the convention was



Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.

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Membership in VVAW is open to all people who want to build a veterans' movement that fights for peace and justice. Most of our members are veterans of the Vietnam era, but we welcome veterans of all eras, as well as family members and friends to our ranks. The annual membership fee is \$20.00, sent to the National Office (not required of homeless, unemployed or incarcerated vets).

VVAW is a democratic organization. Chapters decide on local programs and projects under the general guidelines of the national program. Chapters elect local leadership and representatives to annual national meetings where major organizational decisions are made and national coordinators elected. These coordinators are responsible for the day to day organizational leadership of VVAW and issuing national publications.

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MACV Insignia

US Military Assistance Command (MACV) [official design by the institute of Heraldry, US Army]. Under this insignia 60,000 Americans and 3 million Vietnamese died.



Yellow and red are the Vietnam colors. The red ground alludes to the infiltration and aggression from beyond the embattled yellow "wall" (i.e. The Great Wall of China). The opening in the wall through which this infiltration and aggression flow is blocked by the white sword representing United States military aid and support. The wall is arched and the sword pointed upward in reference to the offensive action pushing the aggression back.

It was first issued to the 12,000 "advisors" in Vietnam in March of 1963.

Insignia of
Vietnam Veterans
Against the War



We took the MACV patch as our own, replacing the sword with the upside-down rifle with helmet, the international symbol of soldiers killed in action. This was done to expose the lies and hypocrisy of US aggression in Vietnam as well as its cost in human lives. As with all the propaganda put out by the government to justify US intervention in Indochina, the MACV insignia also put forward lies. The US military was not protecting the Vietnamese from invasion from the People's Republic of China, but was instead trying to "save" Vietnam from itself.

Our insignia has come to represent veterans fighting against new "adventures" like the Vietnam War, while at the same time fighting for a decent way of life for veterans and their families.

Our insignia is 30 years old. It belongs to VVAW and no other organization or group may use it for any reason without permission.

Beware of VVAW AI

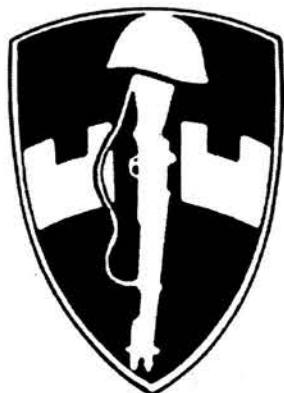
This notice is to alert you to a handful of individualists calling themselves the "Vietnam Veterans Against the War Anti-Imperialist." Their activities are centered mainly in Seattle, San Francisco and New York City. They often claim to be part of our organization and their most recent antics include burning American flags at demonstrations.

"VVAW AI" is not a faction, caucus or part of VVAW. They are not affiliated with us in any way. "VVAW AI" is actually the creation

of an obscure, ultra-left sect called the Revolutionary Communist Party and is designed to pimp off of VVAW's history of struggle and continued activism. Their objective is to create confusion and deception in order to promote themselves.

We urge all people and organizations to beware of this bogus outfit. Don't be fooled: they are not what they claim. Forewarned is forearmed.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.



For more information and to make donations:

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- vvaw@prairienet.org
- <http://www.prairienet.org/vvaw/>

RECOLLECTIONS

The Illinois National Guard — Sixties Style

BILL MACHOTA

I was born in 1942 in Harvey, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. Dad never went into the Army because he worked at a plant that was manufacturing munitions. Mom died when I was seven, so Dad packed up my brother, sister and me and we moved to Chicago, where he had a much better chance to get a job. I grew up in the "Back of the Yards" neighborhood and lived there until 1965. You've all heard about growing up in the Fifties and it's all true, so there is no need to bore you.

When all the guys became of draft age, decisions had to be made: join the Army, Navy, or Air Force — or sign up for six years in the National Guard. It was a split decision among the group I hung around with. In the early Sixties Vietnam was not on anyone's mind. Most of them chose the Army so in two years their obligation would be over.

It all started for me in the spring of 1963. Vietnam was now beginning to become a big issue; the Civil Rights movement had started. I had just been given a promotion and, most important of all, gotten engaged to be married. All of this, and I was ripe for a letter from Uncle Sam. I needed to make a decision: do I forego the new promotion, with the possibility of it not being there when I get back, and, just being away from my future wife for two years — well, I didn't think that was such a good idea. Because I had an obligation to fill, I had to do some-

thing, and what I chose was to join the National Guard. Four of us from our group all made the same decision, opting to keep our jobs and still fulfill our commitment to Uncle Sam. Unbeknownst to all were the events that would occur in the next six years.

Other than during the Korean War, the National Guard was pretty much like a sleeping dog. To fulfill that obligation, all that was required was once a week you went to a two-hour training meeting and once a year you went to two weeks at summer camp to do a little practice on what in my case was the artillery. In conversation with the old lifers in the unit I was in, they said, "Heck, nothing has happened here in twenty years!" Well, I don't think it took me more than two or three weeks before things started to "cook." It was in the middle of July of '63, before I was even inducted into the Army, that the unit I belonged to was called out for the first civil disturbance of that era. This disturbance was the beginning of the many civil rights movements before the King era. Granted, we didn't really go anywhere; we were just on call, but that was the beginning of many things to come.

It took a few years for things to really get rolling, but when it did, it really hit the fan! During the next few years, a number of minor civil rights disturbances took place. We were called out so



often that it became a joke and we would be called "Governor Kerner's Rent-A-Guard" — just like a Hertz Rent-A-Car.

It was early in 1966, with the escalation of the Vietnam War, that the government decided that the National Guard should take a bigger role in the defense of the country. That day at the armory when they picked who would remain with the old unit and who would be transferred to a combat-ready unit will always remain in my memory. It was a scary feeling, especially when you figured that there was no way a guard unit would go to Vietnam. When I told my wife that evening what was happening, all we could do was hope we wouldn't have to go to combat. It was at this time that I went from one two-hour meeting a week and two weeks of summer camp to getting transferred to a combat-ready unit and going for

two full weekends a month plus the two weeks of summer camp. The whole idea behind this, of course, was to prepare us for a trip to Vietnam, and since I was in an artillery unit, we would be one of the first, other than reconnaissance, to be called out for this wonderful trip.

1967 proved to be another interesting year. Up through April, things were quiet. Then, on April 21, as we were getting ready to go out to celebrate my wife's birthday, a massive tornado hit the city of Oak Lawn. It destroyed part of a school and much of the community that lay within its path. Because of the massive destruction, it was a little too much for the local police to handle the area — to protect these homeowners from the looters and all the other riff-raff that would feed off somebody else's misfortune. We were called out the following day and sent to Oak Lawn to protect the property of all these poor unfortunate people. This tour of duty lasted five days. The upside of this tour was that the people were very appreciative of our presence. The downside, of course, was a week away from your home and family — and your job. A few short weekend call-outs and the year ended uneventfully.

Then came 1968 and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Most of us remember the massive rioting that broke out on the west and southeast sides of Chicago. Our unit was called out, after the first few days, to assist the police in controlling the riot-



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