



THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

50¢

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On the Oil-Slicked Road to Empire: Are We Really Safer Now?

BARRY ROMO, DAVE CURRY AND JOE MILLER

Couldn't they at least save a museum full of cultural treasures?

If a war is wrong before it starts, it's still wrong after it starts. It's still wrong even after a victory. By crossing the Kuwait border and invading Kuwait, Saddam Hussein was wrong. And by crossing the Kuwait border and invading Iraq, George Bush was just as wrong.

This was not a war of self-defense. This was not a war against weapons of mass destruction (WMD). This was a war for money and power, not democracy and safety. And with its victory, America moves closer to the status of empire.

If it wasn't about oil, why did the coalition of the willing get guards to the petroleum ministry and not to the international museum of antiquities?

US forces are protecting the oil but not the hospitals.

Months ago the Bush administration made public its goal to "democratize" or "denationalize" Iraq's vast oil resources. Democratizing oil would have to involve bringing in the multinational corporations that control oil in the so-called "democracies." Market mechanisms already developed in democratic countries would insure dividing the spoils fairly among the competing companies.

According to Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld, the United States invaded Iraq because Saddam posed a threat to his neighbors and had weapons of mass destruction. However, 99% of Saddam's neighbors didn't buy this. That's why 99% of the coalition of the willing was made up of the US and the UK. And, where are those huge stockpiles of WMD? Hell, where are any?

Photo ops and scenes of crowds of enthusiastic civilians have already given way to tens of thousands of demonstrators chant-

ing for America and Britain to leave. How long before chants change to grenades? We've seen US/UK casualties and some POWs, but nothing about the Iraqi dead. There is no body count here because we killed a lot of them, and that image doesn't fit the press conference scenario.

republics of the Soviet Union?

The Pentagon has gone out of its way not to inform, but only to provide glimpses from the GIs of Iraqi soldiers not willing to give up, of being bombed and shot and decimated. One military lifer on TV, commenting on the returning POWs, said that they

dren and even Iraqi soldiers. The Senate recently cut a bill to raise combat pay in half. More budget cuts for GIs and soldiers are on the way. The VA hospitals are closing. Too bad a yellow ribbon doesn't pay the rent.

Americans are less safe in our own country than ever in the country's history. We continue to have homeland security alerts and anthrax scares. Many Americans live in fear of terrorism, a fear that is encouraged by our government. At the same time, jobs and health care become increasingly out of reach for all of us.

The historian of the decline of Rome noted: "The principal conquests of the Romans were achieved under the republic." Rome gained control by its superior military might. Rome maintained control by es-

tablishing military garrisons in conquered nations. The Pentagon is already pushing for long-term access to at least four bases in Iraq. The new Imperial America flouts its power, imposes its will, and stops even the development of rising regional powers. The US hadn't even taken Baghdad and Rumsfeld was already threatening Syria. In addition, a majority

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Bush says he cares a lot about democracy, but he's not quite sure what kind. The Shiite Muslims constitute 60% of the population. What do we do if the people of Iraq want an Islamic state? Senators Lieberman and Lugar are already making noises about how the US would have a hard time accepting Islamic rule in Iraq, even if this were the result of a popular vote. Shades of Henry Kissinger and Pinochet's Chile!

There is big talk about self-determination, but the Kurds cannot have a state. How come Lithuania, Ukraine, Slovenia, Vatican City, and on and on can have self-determination but not the Kurds? After the US betrayed these poor people for the last 30 years, covered up their genocide with WMD by Saddam when he was our great and good ally and called for them to rise only to be massacred, shouldn't we assure them of a homeland, just like everyone else? Don't the Kurds deserve this as much as the former

would have nightmares for a while but that they would go away soon. Tell that to the 'Nam vets that can't sleep. Hell, tell that to WWII combat vets!

GIs and veterans from this war can't really expect any better treatment when they get home than was provided for Vietnam vets or vets from Gulf War I. They are not even home yet and already they are talking to the media about guilt over killing women and chil-



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From the National Office

JOE MILLER

Welcome to the Spring/Summer 2003 issue of *The Veteran*!

First of all, we'd like to thank the hundreds of you who have newly joined or rejoined Vietnam Veterans Against the War in the past six months. This has been a tremendous show of support and a signal of the continued relevance of the veterans' peace and justice movement. This is also a sign that we are not about to be silenced in Bush's America. We "old soldiers" (and sailors and airmen/women) are not even going to "fade away"! This is something to be celebrated and something we must use to continue our long-term struggle for peace and social justice here and abroad. Articles in this issue will reflect the high degree of involvement of war veterans in the global opposition to Bush's war in Iraq, and we need to be prepared to continue and deepen our involvement in such efforts.

With every war, new veterans are recruited to our movement, as they come to recognize that the idealism that took them into military service had been betrayed by the political and economic elites who make policy. Most of us in VVAW were these idealistic young men or women who enlisted in the service. We

were "educated" to believe that our country was always in the right, and each successive generation of veterans has had to learn the hard way that this is seldom, if ever, true. In this issue, we hear from "Buzz" Doyle, a combat veteran of the 1990-91 Gulf War, who joined VVAW soon after he returned home. He is only one of the many Gulf War vets who found us to be a welcoming place. How many will come to us from this latest war?

As the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld "axis of evil" sent young men and women to fight and die in an illegal war against Iraq, they were trumpeting the notion that "real" support for the troops meant to just shut up. At the very same time, the Republican-dominated House Budget Committee was "supporting" the troops by their attempt to cut veterans' benefits by some \$25 billion over the next ten years. While this may have been temporarily pushed back, we know that they continue to make cuts and will always try to fight these wars on the cheap. To them, the troops are expendable, just another commodity.

And, make no mistake; there will be serious physical health issues coming out of this war, given the cavalier attitude of the Bush

administration toward the use of weapons that contain depleted uranium. They even refuse to clean up the battlefield, arguing that depleted uranium poses no health risks to the GIs or to the local residents.

We should also be prepared for veterans of this war to come home with serious psychological problems derived from post-traumatic stress disorder. They shall join veterans from previous wars in this category. We have already witnessed increased stress levels among earlier generations of veterans. On April 11, the *Chicago Tribune* published a report which stated, "Across the country, visits to Veterans Affairs counseling centers have spiked over the past several weeks, as gulf war vets experience flashbacks, nightmares, waves of depression and panic attacks, officials report."

Pay close attention to the reports coming out of the war theater about troops feeling "anguish" or "remorse" concerning their involvement in Bush's war. What will these young people come home to? Will the planned "welcome home" parades with rivers of red, white and blue make them feel better? How ready will they be to talk about their experiences and the real feelings they have

about participation in this popular, but illegal, war? Who will be there to listen to them?

As with the previous Gulf War, VVAW will be there to provide counsel and support and a place to get active for these men and women. While the government and many in the larger society will forget all about their "support" for the troops, once the war is "won" and "Johnny [and Jane] come marching home," we in the peace and social justice movement must embrace these unrecognized victims of the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld policies.

All VVAW members and supporters should be prepared to continue our efforts for peace and social justice in whatever way we can. We should be involved in our local communities to deepen and strengthen the opposition to a new American Empire. We should look out for every opportunity to assist in "regime change" here at home in 2004.

Simply put, get involved! Celebrate our victories, no matter how small! Make a difference!



JOE MILLER IS A NATIONAL COORDINATOR OF VVAW.

Got something to say? Submission Guidelines for *The Veteran*

- Send us your article via email or post. Plain text in the body of an email message is preferred; check with us before emailing attachments.
- To submit an article, email vvaw@prairienet.org with "Attn: Veteran Editor" in the subject line or mail to:
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If you need a speaker for an event or class visit or interview, please contact the person nearest you.

If there is nobody in your area, contact the National Office at (773) 327-5756 or email vvaw@prairienet.org.

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Operation Dire Distress, March 21, 2003, Washington, DC

Fraggin'

BILL SHUNAS

Members and friends of VVAW will soon be attending Memorial Day ceremonies, much as we have been doing for over thirty years. At these ceremonies, as well as on Veterans Day, we have honored the dead of our wars. We have honored the veteran and have been advocates for better care for veterans. We have used these occasions to speak out against unjust wars which needlessly create more memorials and more veterans.

Another reason we hold ceremonies on Memorial Day is because the memory of those who never made it back alive is used to try to justify participation in unjust wars. We point this out and oppose it. In wars of longer duration, such as Vietnam or the Gulf, how many times have the politicians and hawks urged us on so that those who already died "won't have died in vain"? They try to obscure the fact that the war has no good purpose. They appeal to a desire for retribution and help ensure that more will die in vain.

They use veterans too. In these wars as well as any shorter military actions, you're likely to see TV images or newspaper photos of war-supporting vets saluting the flag. This is a call from those who have gone before to

urge on the new generation to fight.

It is this use of war dead and veterans to promote the new war, or to promote trust in the political leadership, that we in VVAW have long opposed. They would not have you question whether a war or military police action is just. Instead they play on the emotions and respect the American people have for veterans and soldiers who died. We say this is a bogus use of that respect.

Those leaders (most of whom are not veterans) who are responsible for our wars always evoke these emotions. In essence, this misuse of memory is showing disrespect for the dead. If the dead soldier could talk, quite likely he would be the last to promote war, especially unjust war. Such a war means death, dismemberment and agony for no good reason, only for the advantage of the few. This is the ultimate disrespect for the dead.

Same goes for the victims of 9/11. That was an act of war, and while the victims were (mostly) civilians, they have been looked upon as one would look upon those who died at Khe Sanh or the Chosin Reservoir or Iwo Jima or the Somme. It is in their name that

we — well, what do we do? We invade Iraq which had no link to al-Qaeda, the perpetrator of 9/11. We come to find out that long before 9/11 the Bush administration had their eyes on Iraq and that 9/11 was just an excuse to go in. We make plans to do the same to North Korea, Iran and Syria. Maybe we catch a few allies of the 9/11 terrorists. More likely we create more terrorists. We kill civilians. We send our brothers and sisters off to fight and get killed.

In the name of the victims of 9/11, our nation commits to all this. Like veterans and KIAs, the 9/11 victims are used to justify all sorts of illegitimate military and political deeds. Like veterans, they are dishonored by George W. Bush. They are dishonored by Dick Cheney. They are dishonored by Colin Powell. They are dishonored by Donald Rumsfeld. They are dishonored by John Ashcroft. Rice. Perle. Wolfowitz. Same. Same. Our nation's leaders dishonor the 9/11 dead by using them to promote their preemptive wars and to erode our civil liberties on the homefront.

Bush pulled a con job usually called "bait-and-switch." The American people wanted justice for the victims of 9/11. The finger

was pointed at al-Qaeda, who were in Afghanistan, so we went to war there with mixed results. We tried to kill a mosquito with a hammer. We got some al-Qaeda and Taliban, but many are still running around loose in the mountains of eastern Afghanistan and Pakistan.

One thing about going to Afghanistan: even though we went in heavy-handed, we were aiming at al-Qaeda, which was at least understandable. That was the bait, and then Bush switched. Iraq and Saddam had no connection with al-Qaeda. Bush had the CIA looking for a connection to enhance his propaganda effort, but al-Qaeda and Saddam despised one another. There was no connection. So Bush set the bait that we were going after al-Qaeda, who was responsible for the 9/11 crimes, and switched to going after Saddam, who is all bad, but not responsible for the 9/11 crimes. When Bush did this, it was the ultimate diss of the 9/11 victims. Their memory is now being used to bring death and destruction for his political purposes. ☸

BILL SHUNAS IS A VIETNAM VETERAN AND AUTHOR. HE'S A MEMBER OF VVAW'S CHICAGO CHAPTER.

Notes from the Boonies

PAUL WISOVATY

I don't know if you've noticed this or not, but those of us in the peace movement have been taking a lot of flak from our brother and sister Americans. We are even accused of being un-American. Now, let's take that as a working argument. If we're really what they say we are, the last couple of years should have been the best years of our lives. First of all, this country (almost) elected its first double-digit IQ president. We'd have to love that. Then we have this Iraq thing. The USA took a hundred billion dollars that it could have spent educating its kids, or providing for affordable health care and housing for its working poor, and sent it halfway around the world to blow up castles in the sand. Talk about stupid. We'd really get a kick out of that. Then there's this get-tough-on-terrorists campaign. Junior got his brain trust together, and wound up deposing probably the only leader in the Arab world who has never met Osama bin Laden. Saddam was a

secular dictator. Adherence to fundamentalist Islam was never his strong suit. Even the CIA couldn't figure out how to forge documents

un-Americans, that's got to keep us awake laughing all night.

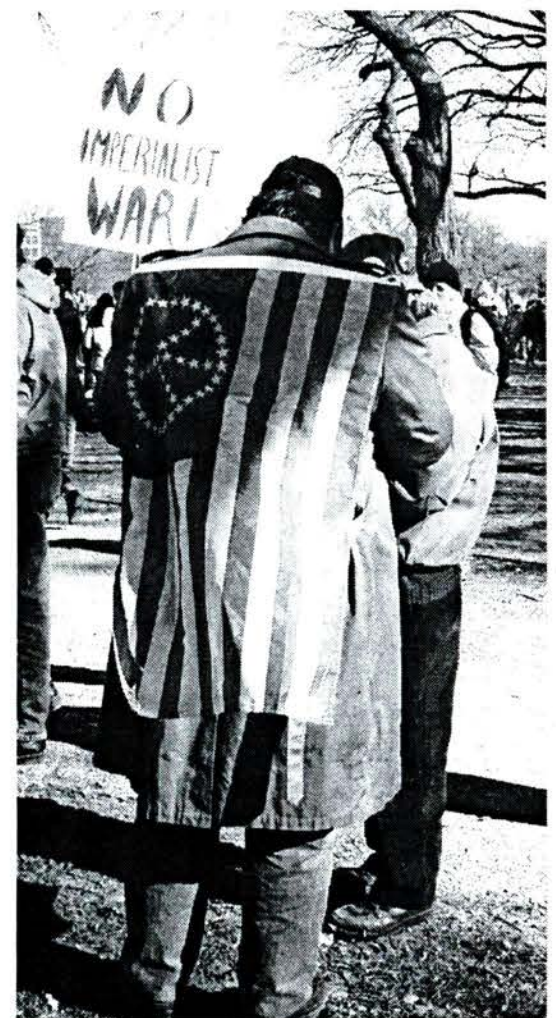
Sue accuses me of

Polls show that Americans in the highest income brackets (presumably the better-educated) support the war far more than those poor bastards making minimum wage.

to show that he was a 9/11 kind of guy. And not only did we get the wrong dictator, we wound up in the process pissing off a couple of hundred million Moslems who might have been otherwise well-disposed toward us, or at least on the fence. As un-Americans, we've got to be hysterical about that screw-up. And here's the kicker. If we really, really hate this country, we get to watch a couple of hundred American soldiers come home in body bags. As

having an unhealthy bent toward sick humor. She is obviously correct. But sometimes it hurts so damn much you just have to laugh.

If I have one complaint about this country, it is the following. We have probably the highest literacy rate in the world. We have a free, if



continued on next page

My View

JOHN ZUTZ

It's time to duct-tape and cover. We've gone back to the good old days when we were told to hide under our desks to protect us from nuclear attack.

Our newly formed Department of Homeland Security has raised our terrorist alert status to "Code Orange," one step higher than "Code Yellow," but one below "Code Red."

Millions of Americans are wondering what this means to them. Luckily, our leaders have the answer. We need to be more alert. Notice anything unusual and report it to the authorities. Be sure to learn first aid.

We're told to buy plastic sheeting and duct tape, a first aid kit, batteries for the radio, and to stock up on food and water. Pre-cut the plastic to cover the doors and windows of an internal room. (Though I don't understand why an internal room would have windows.)

In case of a chemical or biological attack the doors and windows can quickly be covered with

plastic held in place with duct tape to seal the room. Listen to the radio for instructions from the authorities.

The problem is the instructions will come from the same authorities that thought up the actions above. You can bet our leaders have government-supplied shelters for their families. And you can bet they'll be busily giving instructions. But plastic and duct tape is good enough for us riffraff.

Personally, my house is 100 years old, but all the windows are new, so all my drafts come through the walls. I'll need to cover the whole room in plastic sheeting, including the floor and ceiling. Hell, I might as well cover them in aluminum foil as well — shiny side out to keep out the radiation from any dirty nukes.

The Department of Homeland Security employs 170,000 personnel and has an operating budget of \$42 billion plus the budgets of the 22 agencies it absorbed. The best they can come up with is

duct tape and plastic?

Is there anyone in the country who believes those steps will protect him or her from a chemical or biological attack? WAKE UP. The economy might get a boost from the extra spending, but these things are no more than psychological crutches, to make you feel like you're doing something.

After two minutes of study a few of us realized the steps recommended by the government were OK, but didn't go far enough. So rather than wait for further instructions, we got together and, with a liberal application of high proof spirits, devised a list of things Americans should do to be really, really prepared. We guarantee the recommendations found below will be every bit as effective as those from the government.

How to prepare for Code Orange:

1. Do your laundry. You don't want to be found by an emergency worker (or a morgue worker) in dirty underwear.

1(a). Throw the ragged underwear out. Holes are just as bad as skid marks.

2. Close the door. Were you born in a barn?

3. Stop making faces. Your face is going to freeze that way.

4. If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all.

5. You can fool all of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, but you can't fool mom.

6. Stop, look and listen at all railroad crossings.

How to prepare for Code Red:

1. Put your clean underwear on.
2. Place your head between your legs.
3. Kiss your ass goodbye.



JOHN ZUTZ IS A MEMBER OF THE MILWAUKEE CHAPTER AND A VVAW NATIONAL COORDINATOR.

Notes from the Boonies

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somewhat jingoistic press. We have colleges churning out presumably educated young Americans at a mind-numbing rate. And all of the above notwithstanding, we live in a country a majority of whose citizens would probably support a (re-)invasion of Mexico tomorrow if George Bush told us it was a good idea. I mean, sometimes it is really, really, really hard to take this country seriously.

Here's another scary thing. Polls show that Americans in the highest income brackets (presumably the better-educated) support the war far more than those poor bastards making minimum wage. (That's \$5.15 an hour, if you missed my last column.) I have guys coming into my probation office, with ten years of education and driving a 1984 Ford Fairlane, who say to me, "What the hell are we doing in Iraq? Saddam never threatened us. Don't we have enough problems in this country to worry about?" If my child molesters and drunks and drug dealers can figure that out, why can't all those Ivy League guys George brings in?

I should say that it is April 15 as I write this. (Jeff and Lisa are

hell on deadlines, so I'm really scrambling.) I'm sitting in front of my TV watching "The News Hour," and what am I hearing but Junior announcing that "we have intelligence which shows that Syria has weapons of mass destruction, and is harboring terrorists." And I'm thinking: I'm not hearing this. It can't mean what I think it means. The American people couldn't possibly be stupid enough to countenance another invasion of a foreign country.

Do I really believe anything I just said? How many Old Milwaukeees have I had? Am I about to order White Sox World Series tickets too?

Nothing good shall come of this, my friends. Buckle up real tight. As Joan said at Woodstock, "When summer comes rollin' around, we'll be lucky to get out of town."



PAUL WISOVATY IS A MEMBER OF VVAW. HE LIVES IN TUSCOLA, ILLINOIS, WHERE HE WORKS AS A PROBATION OFFICER. HE WAS IN VIETNAM WITH THE US ARMY 9TH DIVISION IN 1968.

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Anti-War March in DC

JOHN ZUTZ

Everyone kept saying how cold it was. The coldest day of the year in Washington, DC, they said. I didn't feel cold. Twenty degrees Fahrenheit. Not cold enough to see your breath. Tell people it's mind over matter. You know: if you don't mind, it doesn't matter. I never wore my gloves, though I used my pockets for warmth.

**HEY, HEY, UNCLE SAM
WE REMEMBER VIETNAM
WE DON'T WANT
ANOTHER WAR
PEACE IS WHAT WE'RE
MARCHIN' FOR**

It was January 18, 2003. A brisk, sunny day in DC. A day when hundreds of thousands of people would try to influence our government to stop this senseless war, specifically the one against Iraq.

It was like being surrounded by thousands of friends. All those friends helped keep each other warm.

More importantly, I was there with close to three hundred organized veterans to remind our government of the true cost of war. Vietnam Veterans Against the War were represented, along with a larger contingent of Vets for Peace. There were VFP banners from all over the East Coast. Many were members of both groups. Some were individuals who approached, identified themselves as vets, and asked to march with us. We all blended together.

**CHENEY, RUMSFELD,
ASHCROFT, POWELL
BUSH'S CRAP IS
SMELLIN' FOUL**

**GOT TO BE A BETTER WAY
TIME TO PUT THE
GUNS AWAY**

I got to DC in a bus full of peace activists (one of twelve buses from Wisconsin) on what can only be described as a brutal schedule. Leave Milwaukee at 5:00 p.m. Friday. Arrive in DC at 10:00 a.m. Saturday. At about 6:00 p.m., leave DC. Arrive in Milwaukee at 10:00 a.m. Sunday. Stop to stretch every four hours whether you need it or not.

Pile out of the bus around 10:00 a.m., about a block from the vets' rally point. Take a few photos with friends from the bus, then on to the rally point. There were many vets there ahead of me to make me welcome. I got the banner displayed, and when I began handing out VVAW buttons I became very popular.

The banner was a photo-op right from the start. Everyone wanted to take a picture. A photo even made it onto one of the big news websites. But it was the individuals who rejoiced at having veterans in the demonstration, and thanking us for being there, that were the most memorable.

**DUBYA BUSH WANTS
TO ATTACK
SEND THE ARMY TO IRAQ
GUNS TO SHOOT AND
BOMBS TO DROP
ALL THIS KILLING
HAS TO STOP**

The creativity was enormous. "Drop panties, not bombs," with frilly underwear attached to a poster, attracted my attention. Some signs were plain, "Blood —

\$1.59 gal." Many were elegant. A few were flamboyant. "Alaskans for Peace" was accompanied by a person in a polar bear suit. It seemed each placard was more exquisite than the last.

The energy built, along with the size of the crowd, during the two hours of speeches. Then someone with a mike said, "Start walking," and the march began. It was total anarchy, blocks of people trying squeeze into a much narrower street. The police said that this was "the biggest anti-war demonstration in DC in thirty years." The veterans' contingent was scattered throughout the crowd.

About halfway through the march the veterans' contingent, in a brilliant strategy, commandeered a small triangular-shaped park on Pennsylvania Avenue. The group re-formed and, with banners high, began reciting cadences to the passing crowd for over an hour. The marchers joined in the cadences and applauded as they passed.

**IF THEY SAY THAT YOU
MUST GO
THERE IS ONE THING YOU
SHOULD KNOW
THEY WAVE THE FLAG
WHEN YOU ATTACK
WHEN YOU COME HOME
THEY TURN THEIR BACK**

The march featured people from all across the country and of all ages and economic groups. It was if hundreds of small, local protests had coalesced into one large movement. Everyone was smiling.

There were also a few counter-protesters. Six people on a second-floor balcony with a little GOP elephant sign and another sign (showing how out of touch they were) that said, "Hippies go home." Another five or six across from the Marine barracks must have felt quite vulnerable: they were protected by 20 DC cops.

**BUSH AND CHENEY TALK
WAR TALK
WE ALL KNOW THEY'RE
CHICKENHAWKS
WE'VE ALREADY BEEN
TO WAR
WE AIN'T GONNA
FIGHT NO MORE**

The first marchers must have reached the end point around noon. I tried to experience as much of it as I could, so I was at the tail end and reached the end point at around 5:00 p.m. By this time the sun was going down, and the temperature was dropping. I was tired and dehydrated. Finding one bus out of hundreds (while they were all idling and spewing diesel exhaust) was not fun. Why are all tour buses painted white?

It took two days to get back into my normal schedule; I don't recommend a trip like this to anyone over 30. I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't felt it was necessary. It's time for more people to stand up.



JOHN ZUTZ IS A MEMBER OF THE MILWAUKEE CHAPTER AND A VVAW NATIONAL COORDINATOR.



VVAW contingent at January 18 demo in DC

Chicago Demo Report — 3/20/03

BILL BRANSON

VVAW turned out for a large demonstration in Chicago the day the war started.

Federal Plaza in the Loop was packed with thousands of people showing their anger and disgust at this illegal and immoral war as well as contempt for Governor Bush and his clique.

Bill Davis of Chicago VVAW was a featured speaker, and drew wild cheering from the crowd.

After about an hour of speeches and chanting, the people took to the streets, splitting into two groups and occupying two entire streets for blocks. The marches joined up again on Michigan Avenue, then walked east to block Lake Shore Drive.

The VVAW contingent proudly displayed a large banner, which drew hundreds of pictures and many appreciative comments from the crowd. As usual, we met many old friends, who joined us for a while.

The march turned into quite a marathon, occupying one and sometimes both directions on Lake Shore Drive. At about the level of the Water Tower, we crossed the dividers and moved towards Michigan Avenue. I heard that the leaders of the demo intended to march back downtown through the Miracle Mile.

At this point, the cops, who had been very accommodating,



Chicago VVAW at Chicago demo February 15, 2003

bottled up the march at an intersection with Michigan Avenue. The crowd continued its heavy chanting, adding "Let . . . us . . . march!" We VVAW people, being a bit older and more experienced, found ourselves a place between two parked, surrounded police cars and avoided the crush in the intersection.

After continuing what had become a standing rally for over an hour, we noticed that the cops were forming up behind us.

Discretion and exhaustion prevailed, so we withdrew. Later on, we watched the news as the cops surrounded over a thousand marchers, brutalized many and arrested every one. It is always infuriating to see this cowardice

on the part of the police, picking on the small women first, dragging people to the lockup, arresting people who were peacefully exercising their human (what Constitution?) right to protest.

Even the local news stations seemed perplexed to explain the police action, in light of the peaceful behavior of the marchers. In any case, property rights prevailed over human rights.

Most of us in VVAW have been in Chicago for over 30 years. We have NEVER seen the people take the streets as they did that night! Even the protests at the start of the Gulf War were not so forceful. Reaction from the passing cars and onlookers was 99% positive. The sound of car horns

honking and the hands with peace signs sticking out of windows were almost continuous.

Today, the day after the march, we are resting our tired bones and sore feet, but many people are still holding smaller rallies and marches in downtown Chicago.

We are all determined to continue to do our best to end this war and save as many American and Iraqi lives as possible.



BILL BRANSON IS A VVAW NATIONAL STAFF MEMBER AND A MEMBER OF VVAW'S CHICAGO CHAPTER. HE HAS BEEN IN VVAW FOR OVER 30 YEARS.



Bill Branson and Bill Shunas, Chicago demo, February 15, 2003



VVAW contingent at January 18 demo in DC

Peace-Seekers Organize in Switzerland

EDESSA RAMOS

The first mass protest against the (then impending) war in Iraq took place in Berne, the capital of Switzerland. It was freezing on that Saturday, the 17th of February. From little children in prams to fur-clad ladies and elderly folk, over 40,000 protesters flooded the streets of the medieval city. It was the largest since the 1983 peace demo. A record-breaker for so small a country with only six million inhabitants. "We are against a war that would be paid for by millions of people around the world through heightened joblessness and deeper poverty," declared one speaker. It was a rare moment for a population that is often perceived as distant to world affairs, being in a "neutral" country. A people often misjudged as apathetic or apolitical because their voices are seldom heard in the realm of political affairs. Well, this time the Swiss are speaking out. And their voices are definitely declaring NO to this war.

Switzerland is also the home to many foreigners, including a huge community of American expatriates. Altogether, the people in Switzerland are expressing open criticism of US foreign policy. "War as a first resort" is never acceptable, the people say. You will hear them in heated discourses in bars, neighborhood restaurants, even fire department meetings. They have already been perplexed by the heavy US presence in the

Balkans which did not result in any concrete reconstruction of that region. They decry the US war in Afghanistan, which is still ongoing despite the loss of interest on the part of the media, and which, in their perception, did not bring about the promised postwar measures towards normalization. They are angered by the rhetoric about American democracy being the only existing and acceptable style of democracy in the world. They are concerned about US intervention in the Middle East which has brought no concrete contribution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

All these built up to the current vehemence with which people here in Europe react against the American-led war in Iraq. Disgusting, they say, how one government could so easily use brute force to bend another country to its will, consciously blind to the massive suffering it would cause undefended civilians, and in arrogant disregard of all UN efforts to find a peaceful solution. Totally enraging, they say, to seek war when so many countries have declared that a "first strike" option should never be an option. And shameful that the UN has allowed itself to be so bullied and made irrelevant.

Last week, US embassy representatives met with students during an info forum in a Zurich high school. The embassy officials were seemingly unprepared

for the avalanche of criticism from the young people. What gives the USA the right to be world policeman, asked one student. War is never the solution, said another. The teenagers exhibited such high levels of awareness and uncompromising positions that the teachers themselves were amazed.

More and more balconies are being adorned with the "peace flag." The flag's official distributor in Switzerland, reports a sale of over 40,000 in ten days.

Folks are shedding tears over the images of civilian casualties on TV. They are profoundly disturbed by the look in the eyes of the captured US soldiers they saw on CNN. I know people who have arranged their lives so that they can hop on a train and join the next demonstration in Milan, the last of which numbered over one million. Many more satellite demonstrations are erupting in various cities in Italy, Germany and Switzerland, not to mention the massive mobilizations in London.

And last week, in a call for sobriety at a time of insanity, a poetry event was held in a cafe in Berne. Eight poets, including myself, read poems in English, German, French and Italian to a packed audience. The event was organized by Franz Andres Morrissey of the University of Berne in response to a call by the Poets Against the War movement in the USA. Emotions ran deep,

anger was profound. When I walked in there with my guitar and my pieces of paper, I looked into the sober faces, listened to the low murmurs of solidarity, and saw immediately that hope remains alive: in gatherings like these, inside sober cafes or out in angry streets, where one could easily mistake the surroundings for any city in the world. Hope lies in the hearts of ordinary people who deny legitimacy to the US government and its allies for their acts of aggression. From one end of the earth to the other, even the most quiet villages in the most isolated mountains, the protests are uttered in all languages. And this tells us that for as long as people are vigilant, something is about to give, and things will change.



DURING THE '90s, EDESSA RAMOS WAS AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF VARIOUS SOLIDARITY MOVEMENTS IN CHICAGO, INCLUDING VVAW. BEFORE THAT, SHE WAS A HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST IN THE PHILIPPINES. SHE CURRENTLY LIVES IN SWITZERLAND WHERE SHE WRITES, TEACHES LANGUAGE, ORGANIZES INTER-CULTURAL THEATER, AND DEVELOPS INNOVATIVE LEARNING MODULES FOR FIGHTING RACISM. SHE HAS PUBLISHED TWO BOOKS AND PERFORMED IN THE LITERARY FESTIVALS OF SOUTH AFRICA AND CENTRAL AMERICA.



Women Rally Against War

BROOKE ANDERSON

On Friday, March 7, 2003, hundreds of women and men in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois gathered for a Women Against War rally in solidarity with International Women's Day anti-war protests worldwide. International Women's Day began in the early 1900s to commemorate women workers' strikes for better working conditions, and has frequently been used by women to protest war and militarism. Whether the male-dominated history books record it this way or not, women have historically been at the forefront of anti-war mobilizations and other movements for social justice.

By celebrating women's resistance to war, we are not suggesting that women are innately peaceful or that all men are violent warmongers. Nonetheless, it is historically true that imperialism and state violence have been ordered and carried out by men. This is because men have always held most of the elected and appointed positions of power in the world, and in our violent cultures, power is exercised through violence, therefore war has traditionally been "men's business" (or the business of wealthy white men who send mostly young, poor men and men of color to kill and be killed).

But these powerful men who benefit from the spoils of war are the last and least likely to suffer war's tragedies. Women — who have little voice in the politics and decision-making that govern our lives — gain little (and poor women and women of color gain even less) from the acquired colonies and stolen wealth of war, but we pay the price with our bodies, our health, our homes, and our families. Struggling for our freedom at every turn, we know first hand what happens when decision-making is left up to politicians and corporations. Women lose! People of color lose! Poor people lose! So, if we lose when

men in DC busy themselves with war, we women will make it our business to wage and win the struggle for peace. As women, we must embrace our power and responsibility to make social change — to be creators, not just survivors, of our fate.

This patriarchal world favors violence over creative problem solving and mutual understanding, and it exploits concepts of masculinity that make violence a condition of manhood to anesthetize us and make us accepting of violence in daily life. As Emma Goldman, the great anarchist leader, said: "It is organized violence on the top that creates individual violence at the bottom." In what ways will women in the Middle East experience this violence?

Women experience war as death, injury, illness, impoverishment, sexual violence, widowhood, displacement, and detention. In the first Gulf War, 90% of all casualties were among civilians, many of whom were women and children. Rape has always and forever been a weapon of war. Our bodies are just as much the battlefields of war as the deserts and the trenches. Systematic use of rape and forced prostitution by invading armies is a deliberate policy of inducing terror and genocide.

In addition, the decade-long US bombing campaign and sanctions in Iraq have utterly devastated the Iraqi environment, causing unprecedented health problems for all Iraqis, but particularly for women and children. Women also comprise the majority of refugees and experience great horrors and abuse when forced to flee their homes. With the devastation of civilian infrastructure in a new war, Iraqi schools will be bombed, teachers maimed, and books made unaffordable. It could be a decade before Iraqi educational institutions could rebuild, leaving a generation of women without formal



education.

Like women here, women in the Middle East face great discrimination within their own society. But Bush justified his war on Afghanistan in part by pretending the US marines were on a feminist mission to liberate Afghani women from their *burqahs*, when clearly revenge and oil were our priorities. A new war on Iraq will only worsen the condition of Iraqi women. So, when women's equality and liberation are being touted as justifications for "regime change" and war in the Middle East, we need insist that Iraqi women should be the only ones to decide on the just means to their liberation.

While the women in Iraq will suffer the most from an invasion, women in the USA will not gain either. As Virginia Woolf said: "If you insist upon fighting to protect me, or 'our' country, let it be understood, soberly and rationally between us, that you are fighting ... to procure benefits which I have not shared and probably will not share; but not to gratify my instincts, or to protect either myself or my country. As a woman, my country is the whole world."

The violence against US women during this war will be structural and economic violence. Every dollar spent on this war is a dollar not diverted to social programs that guarantee basic life necessities for women and children. Our militarized world has lowered the standard of living for billions of people around the world — the largest percentage of whom are women and children, a phenomenon named the feminization of poverty. We need to organize for a feminist construction of the national budget and a socially re-

sponsible and sane concept of national security. For us, national security is not the Patriot Act, the Homeland Security Department, or the color-coded terrorism alerts. For us, national security is child care and maternity leave, job training, housing, transportation, education, and health care and care for the elderly and disabled.

In wartime, women are asked to postpone indefinitely our struggles for equality while "more important" issues are addressed. By exposing the relationship between sexism and militarism, and by making the equal status of women in society a condition of a just, peaceable world, we can work for both at the same time. Peace is a women's issue. Women's rights must be part and parcel of the anti-war movement.

Slavery abolitionist Sojourner Truth once said: "If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down, these women together ought to be able to turn it right side up again. I believe that we will together turn this world right side up again. The generations of women to come may never know our name or face, but their world and the world of their granddaughters will be a safer place for our efforts."



BROOKE ANDERSON IS A CO-COORDINATOR OF THE PROGRESSIVE RESOURCE/ACTION COOPERATIVE, A COMMUNITY ORGANIZER FOR CHAMPAIGN COUNTY HEALTH CARE CONSUMERS, A CO-FOUNDER OF THE WOMEN'S DIRECT ACTION COLLECTIVE, A BOARD MEMBER OF THE ILLINOIS DISCIPLES FOUNDATION AND A MEMBER OF VVAW'S C-U CHAPTER.



Are We Really Safer Now?

continued from page 1

of these neo-cons inbred in the Pentagon are threatening Iran. No one knows who we will invade next, but don't expect much of a breather. Our troops are in the area, and they are there to stay for a while. We should not be fooled by the chess-playing moves of Rumsfeld in shifting troops from one area to another.

Iraq, along with its oil and humanitarian problems should be turned over to the UN and international humanitarian organizations. American troops must return home. The Iraqi people and the Kurds must determine their own future.

We do not have to go along

with this empire building. We should not allow more US troops to be used as cannon fodder in this "Project for the New American Century"! We in the peace and social justice movement should not allow ourselves to become demoralized because we did not stop this war. We should celebrate and build upon the worldwide movement that was in the streets and in the city council chambers and parliaments as an opposition to the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld war. We should be centrally involved in every possible effort to engage in "regime change" here in the United States.

In particular, as veterans, we

played and continue to play a central role in challenging this march to empire. We know what it's like to have been lied to in a war — many wars, in fact. We know what it's like to be part of a military machine that is only in place to defend the economic and political interests of a narrow stratum of people who want to maintain their power and position. We know what it's like to come home to shrinking veterans' benefits and closing VA hospitals. In the thirty-six year history of VVAW, we also know what it is like to take the long view and maintain our activism for the long haul.

We should be in the forefront of evaluating this war and its consequences. We should help to educate our brothers and sisters in the

military and in the larger community as to the meaning behind the neo-con effort at empire-building and the real costs, human and otherwise, of this effort. In the end, we are not safer with the "victory" in Iraq. The struggle for a peaceful and just world order continues, and we cannot afford to hang back now!



BARRY ROMO WAS AN INFANTRY LIEUTENANT IN VIETNAM. DAVE CURRY WAS AN ARMY CAPTAIN IN COUNTERINTELLIGENCE IN VIETNAM. JOE MILLER WAS AN ENLISTED MAN WITH THE NAVAL SECURITY GROUP JUST PRIOR TO THE TONKIN GULF INCIDENTS. ALL ARE MEMBERS OF VVAW'S NATIONAL OFFICE.



Violence Always Goes Too Far

Remarks by Gulf War vet
Susan Ives
Vietnam Memorial
San Antonio, Texas
April 5, 2003

I've been reading a series of detective novels set in modern day Botswana. The owner of the Ladies Number One Detective Agency has become a hero of mine. In the first book she said, "I love all the people whom God made, but I especially know how to love the people who live in this place."

What a definition of patriotism! I love all the people God made but my own people — these Americans — are the ones I know how to love the best.

And the Americans I have learned to love best are soldiers, because I was one of them for so many years. Many of you know I was an Army officer, a Gulf War veteran. The units assigned to this second Gulf War are my people. The 101st Airborne Division is in Iraq. I was in the 101st the whole time I was a lieutenant, on the General Staff as a plans officer and in the Division Artillery. Fifth Corps is there too, and I was on the Fifth Corps staff in Germany, my last assignment. These are the very soldiers I know how to love the best.

But I say Love, not support. I cannot agree with what they are being told to do by the government, by my government. I think — no, I know — that this is not a just war, that there were avenues of diplomacy that we refused to travel. I am shocked and saddened by this new policy of preemptive war. Turning into a nation of conquerors.

I look at my country and see

our social services being dismantled. We cannot find money to educate the children, we cannot find money for health care for the elderly, we cannot find the 1.9 billion dollars that the VA needs to care for the veterans of past wars. No, there is no money for that. But we can find 80 billion dollars to fight an unnecessary war in Iraq.

I do not feel safer. Do you feel safer? Iraq has never attacked us. If they do have weapons of mass destruction, as our president claims, they have never used them against us. But we have initiated this round of violence, and they will retaliate. We all know that. Violence cannot defeat violence. It never has. If it could, wars would have become obsolete centuries ago.

So no, I cannot support our soldiers if supporting our soldiers means supporting these policies. But I can love them as my brothers and sisters, as the people I have learned to love the best.

It is because I love these soldiers and because I love America that I must protest. I must dissent. I must speak out. This is my duty as a citizen.

I was born and raised in Philadelphia. Just as many of you were raised on the story of the dissent against Mexico that created Texas, I was raised on stories of Pennsylvania's founder, William Penn, a Quaker. He refused to pay taxes to England to support an unjust war against Canada. He dissented. We were all taught in history classes about the Boston Tea Party — dissent. We learned about the speeches, the rallies, even the street theater of our colonial forebears. Dissent, dissent, all of it dissent. And our founding

fathers thought that dissent was so important that they guaranteed it in the Bill of Rights:

freedom of the press,
freedom of speech,
freedom of assembly.

Dissent, dissent, all of it dissent.

It is because I love the soldiers that I dissent. It is because I love my country that I speak out. These soldiers — the people I know how to love the best — have been sent to Iraq in the name of democracy. It is my job, my duty to make sure that there is a democracy left for them to come home to.

A labor organizer, Amon Hennacy, once said that being a pacifist between wars is like being a vegetarian between meals. Now that we are a nation at war, dissent is harder. Some tell us that we must blindly accept whatever our government tells us. To do otherwise, they say, will dishearten the troops.

This is an insult to our soldiers. They are not children. They are men and women — intelligent men and women, who studied the same history you and I studied, who read the same Constitution. They can think. They can read. They can analyze. They do not need to be fed pablum. They are not so fragile or so stupid that they have to be told some dumbed-down happily-ever-after fairy tale. They are the ones whose lives are at risk. They deserve to know the truth. Not lies. Not whitewash. The truth. If we love them, we will tell the truth.

These are hard times to oppose war. I am a realist, and I know we cannot pull out of Iraq today. It has gone too far. Violence

always goes too far. To leave now would be a betrayal of the Iraqi people. And we cannot win the battles and leave. We must stay now, to rebuild Iraq and guarantee the safety of its people.

So what am I protesting? What is my dissent?

First, it must stop here. There is talk that since we're over there any way, how about Iran? How about Syria? How about the whole Middle East? I say no. This entire concept of preemptive war is evil. It must stop.

Second, we must rebuild Iraq with honor. We must rebuild it for the Iraqis and not for multinational corporations who value profits over people. The whole world is watching how we handle this and we cannot succumb to greed.

Third, we cannot let this state of fear, this state of war, intimidate us. We dissenters, we patriots, must defend our liberties. We cannot trade our precious freedoms for the illusion of safety.

Finally, we must build a culture of peace. We must learn to love all the people of the world just as we have learned to love our own people.

I do not want to dissent. I do not want to protest. I do not want to spend another Saturday standing in front of a memorial to dead soldiers speaking out against another damn war. But if I must dissent I will. Will you dissent with me? If I must protest, I will. Will you protest with me?



SUSAN IVES SERVED IN GULF WAR I AS A LIEUTENANT WITH THE 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION.



Milwaukee VVAW members at the Wall in DC

Quit Making More Combat Veterans

*Statement by
Robert M. Bowman
March for Peace
Melbourne, Florida
February 15, 2003*

I'm here representing Veterans ForPeace, an organization of thousands of combat veterans. All of us have put our lives on the line for this country. And all of us are opposed to a war with Iraq.

Saddam Hussein is a bad guy. I don't know anyone who disagrees with that. He's a bad guy now. He was a bad guy in 1990 when April Glaspie of the State Department gave him the green light to invade Kuwait. He was a bad guy in the 1980s when Donald Rumsfeld sat down with him for a chat while he was gassing the Kurds. He was a bad guy in 1977 when Zbigniew Brzezinski met with him and proposed the invasion of Iran. And he was a bad guy in the 1960s when the CIA hired him to assassinate Iraqi leader Abdel Karim Qassim and then helped him take over Iraq. He's always been a bad guy. But he was always our bad guy. Right up to 1990, official DoD documents praised Saddam for vastly improving the education, medical care, and standard of living of his people. His regime was called one of the most enlightened, progressive governments in the region — and it was.

But there was a problem. The Berlin Wall had come down and

the Soviet Union had collapsed. The first Bush White House had to find another bad guy — fast. And they did: Saddam Hussein. They suckered him into attacking Kuwait, and the first Gulf War was on.

This was the war the first Bush administration wanted, the war they planned for, the war they instigated, the war they salivated over, the war that Saddam's unconditional withdrawal wasn't going to deny them, the war that would show off our smart bombs better than a hundred trade shows, the war that would prove George wasn't a wimp, the war that would make billions for the future president George W. Bush (who had exclusive rights to offshore oil in the Gulf), the war that would kill the "loser" image from Vietnam once and for all.

Now the second President Bush wants his Gulf War too. Planning for it started long before 9/11, even before he became president. In September 1990, his advisers set "regime change" in Iraq as a primary objective of US foreign policy should Bush become president. They made it clear that the purpose of moving against Saddam is to set the stage for occupying the entire Middle East (and therefore controlling its oil, no matter who's in power, especially in Saudi Arabia).

The problems with starting a preemptive war against Iraq are several: (1) It would be immoral

and would probably be judged illegal by the World Court. (2) It would be costly, in terms of American lives and in dollars. (3) It would require us to keep troops in Iraq indefinitely. (4) It would fracture NATO, split the United Nations, and come between us and our allies. (5) It would incense the Arab world, probably causing the downfall of friendly governments who cooperate with us (like Saudi Arabia and Turkey). (6) It would provide Osama bin Laden with thousands of new recruits ready to die in a holy war against Americans. (7) It would therefore cause an enormous increase in the terrorist threat to Americans at home and abroad. It might even cause World War III. It would destroy our national security and further endanger the American people.

As a combat veteran, I will not stand idly by and watch our security be destroyed by a president who went AWOL rather than fight in Vietnam. I say "NO" to war against Iraq.

As one who has devoted his life to the security of this country, I will not stand by and watch an appointed president send our sons and daughters around the world to kill Arabs so the oil companies can sell the oil under their sand, making us the target of terrorists. I say "NO" to war against Iraq.

I joined the Air Force to protect our borders and our people, not the financial interests of Folgers, Chiquita Banana, and

Exxon. I say "NO" to war against Iraq.

As a pilot who flew 101 combat missions in Vietnam, I can tell you that the best thing our government can do for its combat veterans is to quit making more of them. I say "NO" to war against Iraq.

Peace is patriotic; a preemptive war is immoral, illegal, unconstitutional and a war crime. I swore to uphold the Constitution of the United States against all enemies — foreign and domestic. That includes a renegade president. If this war happens, I will call for the impeachment of George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and the whole oil mafia. I say "NO" to war against Iraq.

We are the people. We are sovereign. The whole world is with us. And we say "NO!" "NO" to war! "NO" to preemptive war. "NO" to wars of aggression. "NO" to war against Iraq. "NO!" "NO!" "NO!"

This war would be treason! PEACE is patriotic. God bless America! And God save us from George W. Bush! Thank you!



DR. ROBERT M. BOWMAN (LT. COL., USAF, RET.) IS PRESIDENT OF THE INSTITUTE FOR SPACE AND SECURITY STUDIES, PRESIDING ARCHBISHOP OF THE UNITED CATHOLIC CHURCH, AND A NATIONAL ADVISOR FOR VETERANS FOR PEACE.

With Our Troops at the Front...

...not present: Rush Limbaugh, Pat Buchanan,
Jonah Goldberg, Christopher Hitchens, Rich Lowry,
Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson, Bill O'Reilly,
and... other heroes
too numerous
to mention...



Feb 28 2003

DANZIGER

TRIBUNE MEDIA www.danzigercartoons.com

Statement of Pvt. Wilfredo Torres

Veterans Day
November 11, 2002

I want you to know that I didn't join the Army so that I could become a political protester. I joined for two basic reasons. I wanted to serve my country and because I was promised a college scholarship and skill training as a cook.

The military seemed like a good choice for me to fulfill my dream of becoming a restaurant chef. When I told my friends in Rochester that I'd enlisted most of them said that I'd made a big mistake. They said that instead of learning to be a chef that I'd be marching through the desert with a rifle, and you know what? They were right!

I handled the physical side of Basic Training very well; it was

the verbal harassment and threats by the drill instructors that got to me. I complained to my Army chaplain but their harassment actually grew worse. When I asked them for Celexa, a prescription drug which I'd taken before for emotional upset, they ignored me.

Like everyone else in my unit, September 11 shocked me. However, given my continuing difficulties with one of the DIs, I decided to leave for my own health and safety.

Since I left Ft. Benning, Georgia last November, I've thought about our country's foreign policies and my potential role as a soldier.

I've decided that it would be wrong for our country to attack Iraq on its own, without working as part of the United Nations. I'm

no expert, but I think that such an attack would undermine the UN and affect America's standing in the world.

I mean no disrespect to military veterans by announcing my decision on Veterans Day. On the contrary I have the greatest respect for them. But from what I've read lately, our government has not done a good job of caring for Gulf and Vietnam veterans who are sick because they served.

I'm returning to the military today so that my case can be resolved. If I must be punished for my leaving, I am ready. I realize that the Security Council has voted for new weapons inspection, but it looks as though the USA may still decide to invade alone. If we do, I won't be going with them.



Update

Private Torres surrendered at Fort Myers, Virginia and was sent to Fort Knox, Kentucky which has become a center for "processing" returning AWOLs. Torres reported that at least sixty other AWOL soldiers were in the unit upon his arrival, many having already spent several weeks awaiting the resolution of their cases. A phone call from a Rolling Stone reporter asking to interview Torres got the command's attention. The next morning he was quickly processed for discharge, seven days after he had arrived. He was given an Other than Honorable discharge administratively in lieu of court-martial and driven to the local bus depot.

Reporting War

DAVID DOYLE

During the '91 Gulf War, I was with the Marines 1st Light Armored Infantry Battalion. For the months leading up to and during the air war, we patrolled the Saudi-Kuwait border, going back to a rear area only a couple of times. Standing orders were to turn away any reporters that came to our area. We were to answer questions like where we were from, who we were, what unit we were with, all the standard inquiries. Anything of a less benign nature was met with a refusal to answer, and possibly a menacing response.

We learned to play the game. We accepted cigarettes (a full carton once off of a Brit) as a bribe to possibly give more information, but never was anything more said, not that we really knew much ourselves. There were really only a couple of times I personally saw any reporters up on our line. I figure the units behind us must have turned them away before they could even get near our position. I do know for certain that television and newspapers did not show what was happening. The press was kept out and left in the dark. They never really could give an accurate report. By the end of the war, as we were busy getting ready to go back to the States, I began to wonder what, if anything, the US public had been able to see and learn.

Now, as I sit and watch cov-

erage of this war in Iraq, I wonder what I might glean from the news. I'm skeptical as to what information will be allowed over the airwaves. Everyone is talking so high about this unprecedented situation of reporters being embedded with combat units. Certainly this gives them the opportunity to possibly witness events firsthand, and to experience the war on which they are reporting. But will they give accurate coverage, will they show us the real scene, or will they feel as they are part of the unit and in effect become a cheering section?

My question has been answered. Mainstream media has not shown me anything except what they know the public won't run from. I suppose I should have known — they are in the business of selling advertisements. If the US public doesn't watch, they are doing a poor job; if the generals think they are undermining the military, they get sent away. Toe the line: maybe they're thinking that's what they have to do while embedded with the Marines.

I think that if we had had a reporter among us in '91 we would have given him no end of grief. It's possible they are more scared of US troops than they are of Iraqis. They need to stay in there so that can write their books in five years. Don't rock the boat, or be stuck with no job and no informa-

tion. Mr. Arnette is all the proof anyone might need.

One lesson of the Gulf War has not been learned. The US public ought to know full well that the realities of military engagement are hidden from them. Iraqi civilian casualties from '91 range anywhere from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands, depending on the sources you read. Yet the lasting scenes are those of the surrendering soldiers, and of smart bombs. I personally don't know if anything else was shown, but I do recall the scene. I also recall much more gruesome and chilling

scenes, scenes that were missed and even today, despite embedded reporters, are being bypassed.

The only question I have left about the media in this war is this: which ad agency came up with this recruitment video?



DAVID "BUZZ" DOYLE IS A FORMER MARINE AND COMBAT VETERAN OF THE GULF WAR IN 1990-91. A CHICAGO NATIVE, HE HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF VVAW SINCE 1992.



Buzz Doyle, Chicago, Memorial Day rally, 1999

Spring Break: Operation Dire Distress

BOB RIGGLE

On Friday, March 21 Michael Goetsch, Dave Kettenhofen and myself headed off to DC Land for a little "spring break." Our mission was to participate in Operation Dire Distress. After checking into our hotel to rest up and get a grip on our jet lag we felt a need for a good meal and a good pint or two. Leave it to the "Milwaukee Boys" to sniff out three good brewpubs within four blocks of their hotel.

Operation Dire Distress was a two-day gathering of various veterans' groups, military family members and supporters. VVAW was a sponsor of this event along with Veterans For Peace, Veterans Against the Iraq War and others. Saturday's agenda consisted of a teach-in at Kay Chapel on the campus of American University. There were about twenty-six

sent to the audience. Louisa Franklin-Ramirez, whose first arrest for protesting against war was in 1917, was introduced and received a standing ovation — simply awesome.

Prior to arriving at the teach-in the "Milwaukee Boys" had time to do a little sightseeing and picture-taking. Our objective was to visit the Wall, the Korean Memorial, the site of the World War II Memorial and the Vietnam Women's Memorial. While at the Wall we were approached by a Dutch TV crew and asked if we could be interviewed. Always out there networking, we agreed. Little did we know we would be in-

those gathered, so much so that a Vietnamese couple came up to us and asked if they could take pictures of each other in front of the banner. I'd like to think it was VVAW they were fans of, but in retrospect, I think it was the fact that we were the only Vietnam veterans' group present with a banner. This was the emotional high point of the trip for me.

As the march proceeded on to the Wall, a small group was designated to lay a wreath there, as was also done at the Korean Memorial and the site of the World War II Memorial. From there it was on to the Department of Veterans Affairs building. In a small park across the street, statements were read by veterans representing the Gulf and Vietnam Wars and by an atomic veteran. Those statements addressed the issues of biological, chemical and radiation exposure incurred by veterans from their respective eras. I delivered a statement on Agent Orange written by VVAW's John Zutz who was not able to attend due to health problems. These statements were then

attached to a wreath and presented at the entrance to the VA.

On to the Ellipse where there were more speeches, including more words of wisdom from Daniel Ellsberg and VVAW's own Ben Chitty. The day pretty much ended with a body bag being passed around so those who wished could dispose of medals, ribbons, statements, or whatever, a la Dewey Canyon III. This body bag was to be presented to the White House, but after it was learned they would not accept it, a decision was made to turn the body bag into a traveling exhibit that would be taken around the country as an educational aid and allow those who could not come to DC Land the chance to add their own mementos to it.

All in all, it was a decent turnout. Roughly 400 to 500 participants were in the march, the weather gods were smiling on us all weekend, and that Vietnamese couple was there right up to the end.



BOB RIGGLE IS AN ARMY VETERAN, A MEMBER OF THE MILWAUKEE CHAPTER OF VVAW AND A LOCAL CONTACT FOR THE MILWAUKEE AREA.



speakers on the program including our own Dave Cline, Bobby Muller (president of the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation), Daniel Ellsberg and retired rear admiral Gene R. La Rocque, to name a few. The chapel was packed with approximately 250 people interested in hearing the message being sent out. Because I had no opportunity to take notes I did not get the names of all I met, or listened to, or who were pre-

involved with them for about 45 minutes. But they were a really nice group and had some very good questions about our individual military and anti-war careers.

Sunday's event was the peace march. We gathered near the Wall about noon where we eventually formed up to begin our walk. As we milled around waiting for others to arrive we unfolded our VVAW banner. It was THE hit of



Korean War Memorial, Washington, DC



Operation Dire Distress, March 21, 2003, Washington, DC

Petition from Veterans Rejected at White House

JAN BARRY

Taking a petition to Washington signed by more than 2,000 veterans opposed to a preemptive war in Iraq is one thing. Getting someone to accept it is much more difficult.

"We cannot accept anything," said a police officer at the White House. "Put it in the mail."

As bombs exploded in Baghdad and battles erupted across Iraq, more than 400 military veterans and family members demonstrated Sunday in the nation's capital demanding the safe return of our troops. Months of effort to collect signatures on an Internet petition and deliver the message to the Bush administration and Congress seemed undone by the abrupt military assault launched just days before.

delegation to deliver the Veterans Against Iraq War petition to President Bush. Two Vietnam veterans, a Gulf War vet and a female veteran, accompanied by Daniel Ellsberg of Pentagon Papers fame, approached the security fence and spoke to a police officer on duty in front of the gate.

"We would like to deliver this petition to the president," Stewart Nusbaumer, a Marine veteran who lost a leg in Vietnam, said, leaning on a cane. The lone officer gently but firmly declined to accept the red folder containing the petition with 49 pages of signatures.

"Is there anyone here who can accept it?" a television cameraman interjected. "No, we cannot accept anything," the officer

After a silent procession through the war memorials on the mall, the marchers broke out into cadence calls as they marched up 17th Street towards the White House.

**VETERANS ARE
HERE TO SAY
BRING THE TROOPS
HOME TODAY
WE DON'T WANT
THE IRAQ WAR
PEACE IS WHAT WE'RE
MARCHING FOR**

Next to the Executive Office Building, a spontaneous chant erupted and echoed among the government buildings, surely reaching the adjacent White House.

**BUSH WENT AWOL
YOU CAN TOO**

Among the forest of signs: "I served in Vietnam, my son served in the Persian Gulf, Bush serves the oil industry." Another one said: "Our son is a Marine, don't send him to war for oil." A third said: "We are patriots, we served, did you?"

A large banner near the head of the march said: "Support our troops, bring them home." A small homemade placard said: "Honor vets, stop this war."

Veterans came from as far away as California. One man drove from Cleveland after hearing about the march on C-SPAN, which broadcasted a teach-in at American University on Saturday that kicked off the weekend of protest. A woman veteran flew in from Atlanta. A Gulf War vet flew in from Utah. A bus full of veterans came from New York City. A vanload of vets arrived from St. Louis. Many wore combat insignia from World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and the first Gulf War.

The theme of the Operation Dire Distress march was that the highest patriotism means speaking out against misuse of the men and women in our military to conduct an illegal, unnecessary war. Addressing the assembly on the Ellipse, Vasquez, director of veterans' affairs for Jersey City, New

Jersey, pointed out that America's founding fathers challenged the government of their day. "Patriotism means challenging our government today," he said.

At the teach-in at American University on Saturday, retired admiral Gene LaRocque said that now is the time to stand up for the right to dissent, to save democracy. Bobby Muller, president of the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, brought the audience to its feet with a call to go out and educate the American public about the deadly reality of the Bush administration's dumping of diplomacy to launch a war of aggression. Gulf War vet Charles Sheehan-Miles spoke about the death and destruction in Iraq that was never shown on television at home.

To express their distress, veterans threw military memorabilia into a green body bag, including combat medals and unit insignias. "We are not going to leave stuff here at the White House," announced Dave Cline, president of Veterans For Peace, "because the president's not listening to us, and he'll just throw it away." The body bag and its contents will be taken to future speak-outs as a symbol of our nation in dire distress.

Thirty-five veterans fanned out to speak with members of Congress and their aides from a number of states. A copy of the petition was presented to an aide for Senator Jon Corzine of New Jersey, to be read into the Congressional Record, during a veterans' lobbying effort on Capitol Hill. The petition addressed to President Bush was mailed to the White House.



JAN BARRY WAS VVAW'S FOUNDING NATIONAL PRESIDENT, 1967-71. A COEDITOR OF "WINNING HEARTS & MINDS," HE IS A JOURNALIST BASED IN NEW JERSEY.



New York City, February 15, 2003

Nonetheless, a determined group of veterans and family members gathered near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at noon to deliver a sobering message. Wearing black armbands in mourning for casualties of this brand-new war, attired in military hats and shirts adorned with military ribbons and medals, and carrying American flags and protest signs, the veterans' group was nearly encircled by television camera crews and mounted police.

To a mournful tune on a bagpipe and the haunting beat of a drum, a five-veteran delegation marched with a wreath to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. This scene was repeated at the construction site of the World War II Memorial, the Korean War Memorial and the Department of Veterans Affairs headquarters.

Gathering on the Ellipse by the south lawn of the White House, the marchers sent a five-person

replied. "If you want to, you can mail it."

That's the way Operation Dire Distress went. The White House refused to accept the petition. Congress was out of town. Squadrons of armed cops, many in SWAT team flak jackets, others on horseback and motorcycles, surrounded the veterans as they marched through the streets of Washington near the White House.

But when a heckler taunted the demonstrators with obscenities and provocatively charged the line of marchers, mounted police quickly moved in and pushed the young man back onto the sidewalk and warned him to desist. "He called me a faggot," said Jaime Vasquez, who was wearing a Marine sergeant's coat bedecked with combat medals. "That's verbal assault." Then Vasquez shook off his anger and resumed his peacemaking duties as a parade marshal.

Veterans Against the Iraq War www.vaiw.org

The video of the Operation Dire Distress teach-in at American University is available for purchase. It is three hours and 39 minutes long. The cost is \$24.95 plus shipping. It can be found at:
<http://store.yahoo.com/c-spanstore/175679.html>

Total Support

BEN CHITTY

[Written in response to an online message reading: "Listen folks ... now that we're in there, don't we owe those troops our total support? Nobody is going to change the way in which this thing proceeds from here. Let's just support the troops."]

You ask me if I support the troops?

The men and women in uniform took an oath to protect and defend the Constitution and to obey the orders of the president. Now the president issues unconstitutional orders.

You ask me if I support the troops?

Under "don't ask, don't tell," men and women in the armed forces can be good at their jobs and honorable in their profession, then harassed, discharged, imprisoned — and sometimes murdered

— if they tell the truth about who they love.

You ask me if I support the troops?

For nearly a quarter-century at the Air Force Academy, female students were abused and raped and silenced for the good of the service, while their rapists became officers (and gentlemen) and the men who told the women to keep quiet have since retired full of honor and pay.

You ask me if I support the troops?

The Pentagon uses weapons so toxic they sicken everyone exposed to them, for years afterwards.

You ask me if I support the troops?

Again and again, the Corps sent Marines to their deaths test-flying an airplane (the Osprey)

which the service did not need and cannot use.

You ask me if I support the troops?

The president's advisers give him intelligence briefings custom-fitted to their imperial political agendas, and the president orders soldiers into action based on this faulty intelligence.

You ask me if I support the troops?

One out of every three veterans of Desert Shield and Desert Storm is rated disabled by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The VA says it doesn't know what happened to them, and the Pentagon just doesn't say, period. But the president does propose to cut the VA's budget. And the Senate majority leader says veterans will have to make sacrifices to help pay for this war.

You ask me if I support the troops?

I spent years of my youth in Vietnam learning hard and brutal lessons about war and about my country. In his own youth, the president joined the National Guard to keep from going to Vietnam, then went AWOL from the Guard. Now he turns my lessons upside down, and sends the children of my friends and neighbors into the wrong war at the wrong place at the wrong time.

You ask me if I support the troops?

You might say, in a way, I reckon I do.



BEN CHITTY SERVED IN VIETNAM IN 1966-67. HE HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF VVAW SINCE 1968 AND IS CURRENTLY THE NEW YORK CITY CONTACT.

I Support the Troops

MICHAEL HUREAUX

Long Binh, Vietnam. My bookcase holds a cigar box, painted red and yellow acrylic and decorated with blue swirls by my wife Kathleen. Inside the box is a handful of letters sent my mother from my pops when he was stationed in Long Binh, Vietnam. The letters comment on the beauty of the Vietnamese people and countryside; they run the gamut of things like counsel on personal finances, then as always a nightmare for my parents. There are a few lovingly strained hellos to my two sisters aged seven and five and myself, then ten years of age; and some bewildered commentary on a Vietnamese defense called the Tet Offensive.

I rarely take them down and look at them. The box of letters is a personal shrine to a man I knew for a very brief time. Pops retired from the army when he was fifty-one, having served in Europe and the Pacific during World War II, in Korea, and in Vietnam. He died four years after retirement.

I remember a fiercely complicated individual, a shy, soft-spoken brother. I remember a man, who, before Vietnam, would take great delight in knowing how to make home-fried donuts; a man who painstakingly changed the diapers of his daughters. I think back on a man who delighted in things like the ten-cent paper kites found in the post exchange and the opportunity to teach his fairly

timid son how to run and fall while learning to fly such a treasure. I remember after Vietnam a man whose whole life was wrapped around work and television, a disinterested man, a man given to sudden, violent outbursts of temper. I remember a man of deep depression who succumbed to overweight and hypertension, a man wedged between the toilet and the bathtub the morning of his massive stroke. I recall a man in deep shock, then deep coma. I remember trying to be a man to replace a man I hadn't known for years. What I know of this man is now bound in a handful of ribbon, placed in a box that sits atop the highest object in the apartment with Koranic reverence.

Now, I told you all this to convey what an essentially meaningless slogan the phrase "Support the Troops" is to people like me. I lived on the streets as a young man in the late 1970s, I know how many Vietnam veterans were living out there before organizations like the Veterans of Foreign Wars chose to recognize Vietnam vets as worthy. I know there have been thousands of veterans of Vietnam who didn't even know they were victims of defoliants like Agent Orange and White when they were overseas. My father was one of them. My cousin was another. There were people killed in Vietnam who didn't even know they were killed in Viet-

nam, men who killed and suffered knowing they had killed. People who died of depression and other complications, illnesses from toxins they were exposed to by the Dow Corporation and the United States military establishment. And I know there are thousands who were exposed to depleted uranium in the Persian Gulf twelve years ago, who are to this very day denied any sort of compensation from the federal government. And I know that the same con arrangement continues with the current war, because the powers that be have never been held accountable for the hidden games they pursued during the last one.

I tell you this, because as a layman psychologist, I know that underneath all of my rhetoric there resides the rage of a ten-year-old child, mystified by the death in life of a father he missed horribly. How foolish, how arrogant are the people who own this country, that they believe they can contain such

a rage. I, who have lived on the very periphery of every mass bloodletting they've conducted in the last thirty years, hate them enough to seek their downfall. How much more must it be so for a child in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Turkey, in Pakistan, in Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Yemen, Serbia, where there have been so many fewer opportunities to temper wrath, to see with cooler eyes the doings of this so-called war for democracy?

My dance teacher Edna Wise had her own way of dealing with the mass pathology that has come to dominate politics in the United States of America. She used to say, "Michael, people in this country don't know. And what's worse, they don't know that they don't know." How pointedly accurate her words are to me these days.



MICHAEL HUREAUX IS A MEMBER OF VVAW LIVING IN SEATTLE, WA.



New York City, February 15, 2003

Support Our Troops?

FRED SAMIA

Now that the United States has invaded Iraq, I have been told that, regardless of what I think or feel about such an invasion, I should support the troops that are in harm's way. As someone who was a "troop," I have some thoughts on what it means to be "supported."

Support them how and to what purpose? Do I hope that no harm comes to those mostly young and innocent women and men? Of course, but who put them in harm's way and why? Do I want them to forgo experiences that will change forever who they are? That will rearrange the very core of their being? Yes, most assuredly. Do I want them not to see, firsthand, what it's like to be the best and the bravest before, exalted and cajoled by recruiter and politician, only to return to indifference, lies and neglect? (The Bush administration cut billions from veterans' benefits the same day the invasion began.)

Do I want their bodies to remain free of wounds and sickness, and their minds free of scars? Certainly. Do I want them to enjoy their virility and sexual energy unperturbed by the mantra that killing equals manhood? Do I wish them lasting relationships? And freedom from the waking nightmares of other families blown apart? To spare them the long nights when no amount of darkness will blot out what plays on the backs of their eyelids? To liberate them from being the walking dead, unseen in a blind society? And to never have to realize what being a pawn really means? Yes, without question.

Do I want them not to be the tragic statistics of their generation as we are of ours, comprising the largest minority in prison, and greatest percentages of homeless, and drug and alcohol addicted?

Estimates of Vietnam veterans who have taken their own lives since their return range from 100,000 on up, or at least twice the number that died in combat. The Department of Defense for years ignored Vietnam veterans' pleas for help with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and Agent Orange-caused illness, denying that there was any connection to their service, much the way they ignore Gulf War vets' complaints about the many depleted uranium-induced and other illnesses that have plagued them. As many as 10,000 vets may have died from Gulf War Syndrome, while another 160,000 have been diagnosed with related problems.

If this is what is meant by supporting our troops, then yes, count me among the staunchest. I would have been very happy, at nineteen, to have had such an ally in 1967, before the Marine Corps sent me to the killing fields of the "demilitarized zone" in Vietnam.

If, however, supporting the troops means that I should condone their being sent 7,000 miles away to attack a sovereign nation that has not attacked or threatened us, no matter how reprehensible its leader, to invade a country already decimated by twenty years of war and twelve years of punitive sanctions, then I have to say no, I don't support the troops. (The Gulf War never ceased for the Iraqi people, 200,000 of whom died then, and who were bombed almost daily since. The United Nations documents more than a



Operation Dire Distress, March 21, 2003, Washington, DC

million deaths directly attributable to the sanctions, including 500,000 children.)

If supporting the troops means letting them be used to secure "cheap" oil (unless you count lives per barrel) for our one-person-per-SUV lifestyle and the obscene profits of corporations who bankroll candidates and influence elections, then I say no again. If it means letting them subordinate their humanity to the techno-fix of weapons, which Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld actually called "humanitarian," (even Orwell never envisioned such perversion of language) then no again and always. If it means making them unwitting (and, usually, uninformed) enforcers of a foreign policy that is as wrong as it is murderous, that uses brute force as a first resort, while ignoring the will of a majority of the world's people, then no, never.

Following your conscience and sense of morality is not un-American or unpatriotic, whether a citizen on the streets protesting an unjust "optional" war, or a soldier refusing to carry out what he knows is an inhumane order. The Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals at the end of World War II established that "I was just following orders" is not a legitimate defense.

Civilian casualties have increased with each succeeding war or conflict since the last century. A million Vietnamese noncombatants died in "my" war. And contrary to Pentagon propaganda, the use of "smart" weapons has not decreased the ratio of civilian to soldier deaths. Recent studies show that the percentage of civilian casualties in Bosnia and the Gulf War actually increased with the greater use of guided munitions. As of this writing, three

weeks into the invasion, Associated Press is reporting that 3,250 Iraqi civilians have already died in the bombing and fighting, with Baghdad's five million inhabitants now under fire. (Contrary to the media image, Iraq is not just Saddam Hussein. There are 23,999,999 other people living in that country. More than half of whom are under eighteen years of age.)

Having barely survived several B-52 raids that dropped their "payloads" too close to our positions, I can testify that carpet bombing is anything but pinpoint-accurate. And two-thousand-pound bombs will never be "smart"! Our much-touted satellite-guided Cruise and Tomahawk missiles have proven slightly less than accurate — some of them not only missed their targets, they missed the entire country of Iraq, landing in Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran! The Pentagon claims to not keep figures of Iraqi civilians and soldiers killed, which is untrue. They won't publish those figures, just as the corporate media won't show those images, because it would highlight the overwhelming mismatch of technologies and weaponry, and give lie to the myth of a "clean" war.

No one, individual or nation, escapes war unwounded. It is just a matter of how visible and deep the wound and how and if it ever heals.

Support our troops — stop the killing now.



FRED SAMIA SERVED IN VIETNAM WITH A CO, 3RD TANKS, 3RD MAR DIV, 1967-68. HE HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF VVAW SINCE 1970.



Dave Cline (foreground) at Operation Dire Distress

Spitting on the Troops: Old Myth, New Rumors

JERRY LEMBCKE

The largest anti-war movement in American history emerged during the weeks leading up to the attack on Iraq. Capped by massive rallies in Washington, DC on January 18 and New York City on February 15, the movement spanned generations and united diverse political interests to degrees that surprised participants and pundits alike.

As the war against Iraq commenced, however, public opinion began to shift. The surprisingly favorable coverage given protests in the weeks leading to the bombing of Baghdad on March 19 gave way to evening news reports about the growing numbers of people turning out for demonstrations and vigils to "support our troops." The nightly-news footage of parents and neighbors distraught over their loved ones' deployment to the danger zone testified to the emotional wreckage left on the homefront when troops ship off to war. At the same time, whatever the intent and stated purpose of the public musterings for the troops, the reality was that they were viewed with skepticism by many observers as thinly-veiled pep rallies for the war policy of the Bush administration.

There is still another layer to the pro-troop rhetoric that has escaped commentary, however.

Implicit in it is the assumption that someone doesn't support the men and women in uniform. Behind that supposition lurk the myths and legends of homefront betrayal that have bedeviled American political culture since the Vietnam War, and which have been resuscitated recently by ru-

none of the stories panned out — the Spokane "threat" stemmed from the misreading of a letter in the local paper promising that opponents of the war would not spit on returning soldiers — and yet, in each case the rumors were used to stoke pro-war rallies.

Many of the current stories

besmirch the reputation of the anti-war movement and help construct an alibi for why we lost the war: had it not been for the betrayal by liberals in Washington and radicals in the street, we could have defeated the Vietnamese. The stories also erase from public memory the image, discomforting to some Americans, of Vietnam veterans who helped end the carnage they had been part of.

The facsimiles of spat-upon veteran stories that are surfacing now confuse the public dialogue surrounding the war. Debate about the war itself and the politics that got us into it is being displaced by the phony issue of who supports the troops. Everyone supports the troops and wishes them a safe and speedy homecoming. It's the mission they have been sent on that is dividing the nation and it is the mission that we have a right and obligation to question.

The "support the troops" symbolism also comes with a hidden agenda, a subtext that is about the anti-war movement. Understandably, the war brings a lot of emotion to the surface and some of that feeling stems from frustration with the economy, a sense of helplessness in the face of large-scale social and technological change, and fear that cherished American values are being lost. For some people, the real war is the war at home and the enemy coalition comes bundled for them in the anti-war movement. The redirection of their legitimate anger about the deteriorating quality of life in America onto peace activists is shortsighted scapegoating that won't solve problems.

The truth is that nobody spat on Vietnam veterans and nobody is spitting on the soldiers today. Attempts to silence opponents of the war with those figments of hostility are dishonest and should, themselves, be banished from our discourse.



JERRY LEMBCKE IS THE AUTHOR OF "THE SPITTING IMAGE: MYTH, MEMORY, AND THE LEGACY OF VIETNAM" (NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1998). JERRY IS THE NEW ENGLAND CONTACT FOR VVAW. HE IS ALSO AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY AT HOLY CROSS COLLEGE IN WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS AND CAN BE REACHED AT 508-793-3050 OR JLEMBCKE@HOLYCROSS.EDU.

Nobody spat on Vietnam veterans and nobody is spitting on soldiers today.

mors of hostility toward military personnel.

By early April, stories were circulating in several US cities about uniformed military personnel being spat on or otherwise mistreated. In Asheville, North Carolina, two Marines were rumored to have been spat upon, while in Spokane, Washington, a threat to "spit on the troops when they return from Iraq" was reportedly issued. In Burlington, Vermont, a leader of the state National Guard told local television, "We've had some spitting incidents," and then claimed one of his Guardswomen had been stoned by anti-war teenagers.

Upon further investigation,

are accompanied by stories of spat-upon Vietnam veterans. The recent story of spitting in Asheville, for example, was traced to a local businessman who says he is a veteran who was also spat upon and called a "baby killer" when he returned from Vietnam. An Associated Press story of April 9 reported stories of spat-upon Vietnam veterans surfacing in several cities including Spicer, Minnesota whose mayor said he was spat upon in the San Francisco airport while coming home from Vietnam in 1971.

Similar stories became quite popular during the Gulf War of 1991 which raised my curiosity about where they came from and why they were believed. There is nothing in the historical record — news or police reports, for example — suggesting they really happened. In fact, the Veterans Administration commissioned a Harris Poll in 1971 that found 94% of Vietnam veterans reporting friendly homecomings from their age-group peers who had not served in the military. Moreover, the historical record is rich with the details of solidarity and mutuality between the anti-war movement and Vietnam veterans. The real truth, in other words, is that anti-war activists reached out to Vietnam veterans and veterans joined the movement in large numbers.

Stories of spat-upon Vietnam veterans are bogus. Born out of accusations made by the Nixon administration, they were enlivened in popular culture (recall Rambo saying he was spat on by those maggots at the airport) and enhanced in the imaginations of Vietnam-generation men — some veterans, some not. The stories

STEVE COHEN

JIM LIBAN

Blues Band

In June of 1973 Congress stopped payment on all military activities in South East Asia as of August 15. At midnight of August 14 the last bombs fell, in Cambodia, ending the US military involvement in Vietnam.

Throughout the war neither Republicans or Democrats wanted to raise taxes to pay for the war, feeling it would become too unpopular, so they borrowed money. When Uncle Sam borrows money he sells bonds, the longest being 30 year Treasury bonds.

The last of the bonds financing the war in Vietnam will be paid off on August 15, 2003.

Join us to celebrate.

MATT STEWART

LISA BOUCHER

Celtic Folk Tunes

MORTGAGE BURNING PARTY
Celebrate the end of Vietnam War Debt

\$25 Donation

August 16, 2003 8 P.M. - 1 A.M.

**The Tasting Room 1101 E. Kane Pl.
Milwaukee, WI**

Sponsored by Vietnam Veterans Against the War - Milwaukee Chapter



Chickenhawks, Draft Dodgers and War Resisters

FRITZ EFAW

Much attention has been given lately to men in high government positions who are chickenhawks. They promote belligerence by the USA in their public speech, while in their private actions they reveal a long-standing reluctance to act on their words. In short, they're thoroughly unprincipled.

The London, England chapter of VVAW, established in 1971, was originally formed by myself and two other American draft resisters, one of whom, Frank Aller, was an Oxford student and roommate of Bill Clinton. Frank attempted to get his fellow Rhodes Scholars to join him in firmly renouncing the US war in Vietnam, but he soon realized they knew that as future members of the ruling class there was too much at stake for them ever to do so. Frank had nothing but disdain for them: they were true draft dodgers. He was a war resister.

The difference is that draft-dodging is an act of avoiding personal responsibility, while war resistance is an act of accepting and embracing responsibility, done in solidarity with the struggle of others and in the name of a higher principle than self-interest.

Draft dodgers, as I'd use the term, are those who look for loopholes to evade any accountability to their country, their conscience or their fellow citizens. Resisters, in contrast, understand their country not in terms of its leaders and rulers, but its ideals and principles. Without casting aspersion on oth-

ers, and without fearing castigation, they take seriously citizenship in a post-Nuremberg world and act to whatever extent they find possible. Resistance is undertaken in the spirit of Martin Luther King, of Gandhi, of Eugene Debs, and of Henry Thoreau.

War resistance can take many forms. During the Vietnam War era, resistance began with burning draft cards, refusing induction and demonstrating. Inspired by the civil rights movement, the logic of civil disobedience led to prison terms for some, self-imposed exile for others. For me, and for Frank Aller, resistance began when we were drafted after college. For others, resistance took the form of desertion from the military, either before being shipped to Vietnam or after, upon returning to a Mickey Mouse world of the military stateside. And for others still, who took time to reflect on their military experience once the intense pressure receded, resistance took the form of understanding how their patriotic impulses had been betrayed, repudiating their past and renouncing what had been done in Vietnam in their names. Along the way there were countless incidents of disobeying orders, insubordination and in extreme cases, sabotage and fragging.

While draft resisters and deserters typically took steps after learning about the war abstractly, others learned through direct experience in the military, whether in war zones, on ships and air

bases, in VA hospitals, or through the general atmosphere pervading the military and the nation.

American Exiles in London began as a mutual aid group to help deserters reach France or Sweden. We went on to organize airmen stationed in England, to encourage boycotts of California grape shipments by UK dockers when the UFW called for that, and to form links with various local organizations. Forming a VVAW chapter to join in the struggle for amnesty was an obvious next step.

American men of a certain age all have identical memories of having long ago faced a choice of what to do about the Vietnam War. To enlist or wait to be drafted. To cooperate or not cooperate with Selective Service. To pull strings to land a spot in the National Guard or not. To fake a medical deferment or not. And on and on. The secret we all know about each other is that some of us made honorable choices and others didn't. The chickenhawks didn't.

What lessons can we learn from our history of resistance to the Vietnam War? First, that concessions are not freely given, but must be seized. This was true for ending the draft, achieving limited amnesty, and gaining official recognition of the effects of Agent Orange and PTSD, and it will be true in the future. Next, while the contributions of resistance to stopping aggression and imperialist adventure aren't decisive, they are important. Resistance increases the cost of exercising illegitimate

use of power. In the final analysis, it shortened the war and saved lives. Finally, as with the pointless game of comparing combat to non-combat vet, in-country to stateside, or deserter to draftee, it's futile to draw comparisons between differing degrees of resistance. Each of us knows where we stood then, how we changed, and where we stand now. Today the ranks of the chickenhawks represent the most reprehensible hypocrisy and mendacity; the ranks of VVAW represent solidarity across lines of class, nationality, race and gender.

Nobody knows right now what kinds of resistance lie ahead. Unlike Vietnam, where US power was employed to suppress a popular movement, solidarity with the Saddam Hussein regime makes no sense. In the long run, however, if American troops are used as cannon fodder to expand a world empire, and if the draft is reinstated to provide bodies for that cannon fodder, then we can expect resistance. Let's hope members of the Vietnam generation who learned the disastrous lessons of illegal and immoral wars will then stand ready to show support for the young men and women who find themselves in harm's way.

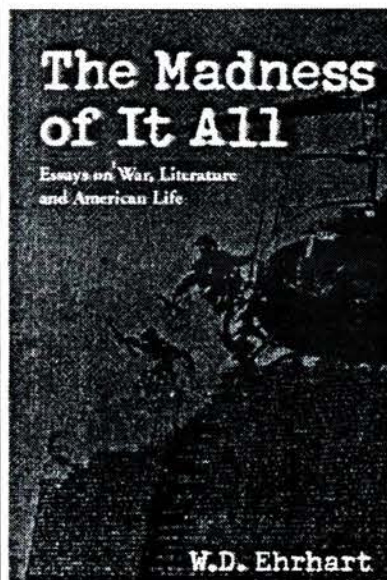


FRITZ EFAW IS AN EMMA GOLDMAN PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL ECONOMY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE AND VVAW'S CONTACT IN CHATTANOOGA.

The Madness of It All

Essays on War, Literature and American Life

W.D. Ehrhart



"I cannot begin to count the number of times over the past 37 years that I have wished I had never heard of Vietnam, let alone fought in the Vietnam War. That experience has haunted my days. It has troubled my nights. It has shaped my identity and colored the way I see the world and everything in it." — from the preface

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The War Against Ourselves

An Interview with Major Doug Rokke

Doug Rokke has a PhD in health physics and was originally trained as a forensic scientist. When the Gulf War started, he was assigned to prepare soldiers to respond to nuclear, biological, and chemical warfare, and sent to the Gulf. What he experienced has made him a passionate voice for peace, traveling the country to speak out. The following interview was conducted by the director of the Traprock Peace Center, Sunny Miller, supplemented with questions from YES! editors.

QUESTION: Any viewer who saw the war on television had the impression this was an easy war, fought from a distance and soldiers coming back relatively unharmed. Is this an accurate picture?

ROKKE: At the completion of the Gulf War, when we came back to the United States in the fall of 1991, we had a total casualty count of 760: 294 dead, a little over 400 wounded or ill. But the casualty rate now for Gulf War veterans is approximately 30 percent. Of those stationed in the theater, including after the conflict, 221,000 have been awarded disability, according to a Veterans Affairs (VA) report issued September 10, 2002.

Many of the US casualties died as a direct result of uranium munitions friendly fire. US forces killed and wounded US forces.

We recommended care for anybody downwind of any uranium dust, anybody working in and around uranium contamination, and anyone within a vehicle, structure, or building that's struck with uranium munitions. That's thousands upon thousands of individuals, but not only US troops. You should provide medical care not only for the enemy soldiers but for the Iraqi women and children affected, and clean up all of the contamination in Iraq.

And it's not just children in Iraq. It's children born to soldiers after they came back home. The military admitted that they were finding uranium excreted in the semen of the soldiers. If you've got uranium in the semen, the genetics are messed up. So when the children were conceived—the alpha particles cause such tremendous cell damage and genetics damage that everything goes bad.

Studies have found that male soldiers who served in the Gulf War were almost twice as likely to have a child with a birth defect and female soldiers almost three times as likely.

Q: You have been a military man for over 35 years. You served in Vietnam as a bombardier and you are still in the US Army Reserves. Now you're going around the country speaking about the dangers of depleted uranium (DU). What made you decide you had to speak publicly about DU?

ROKKE: Everybody on my team was getting sick. My best friend John Sitton was dying. The military refused him medical care, and he died. John set up the medical evacuation communication system for the entire theater. Then he got contaminated doing the work.

John and Rolla Dolph and I were best friends in the civilian world, the military world, forever. Rolla got sick. I personally got the order that sent him to war. We were both activated together. I was given the assignment to teach nuclear, biological, and chemical warfare and make sure soldiers came back alive and safe. I take it seriously. I was sent to the Gulf with this instruction: Bring 'em back alive. Clear as could be. But when I got all the training together, all the environmental cleanup procedures together, all the medical directives, nothing happened.

More than 100 American soldiers were exposed to DU in friendly fire accidents, plus untold numbers of soldiers who climbed on and entered tanks that had been hit with DU, taking photos and gathering souvenirs to take home. They didn't know about the hazards.

DU is an extremely effective weapon. Each tank round is ten pounds of solid uranium-238 contaminated with plutonium, neptunium, americium. It is pyrophoric, generating intense heat on impact, penetrating a tank because of the heavy weight of its metal. When uranium munitions hit, it's like a firestorm inside any vehicle or structure, and so we saw tremendous burns, tremendous injuries. It was devastating.

The US military decided to blow up Saddam's chemical, biological, and radiological stockpiles in place, which released the contamination back on the US

troops and on everybody in the whole region. The chemical agent detectors and radiological monitors were going off all over the place. We had all of the various nerve agents. We think there were biological agents, and there were destroyed nuclear reactor facilities. It was a toxic wasteland. And we had DU added to this whole mess.

When we first got assigned to clean up the DU and arrived in northern Saudi Arabia, we started getting sick within 72 hours. Respiratory problems, rashes, bleeding, open sores started almost immediately.

When you have a mass dose of radioactive particulates and you start breathing that in, the deposit sits in the back of the pharynx, where the cancer started initially on the first guy. It doesn't take a lot of time. I had a father and son working with me. The father is already dead from lung cancer, and the sick son is still denied medical care.

Q: Did you suspect what was happening?

ROKKE: We didn't know anything about DU when the Gulf War started. As a warrior, you're listening to your leaders, and they're saying there are no health effects from the DU. But, as we started to study this, to go back to what we learned in physics and our engineering—I was a professor of environmental science and engineering—you learn rapidly that what they're telling you doesn't agree with what you know and observe.

In June of 1991, when I got back to the States, I was sick. Respiratory problems and the rashes and neurological things were starting to show up.

Q: Why didn't you go to the VA with a medical complaint?

ROKKE: Because I was still in the Army, and I was told I couldn't file. You have to have the information that connects your exposure to your service before you go to the VA. The VA obviously wasn't going to take care of me, so I went to my private physician. We had no idea what it was, but so many good people were coming back sick.

They didn't do tests on me or my team members. According to the Department of Defense's own guidelines put out in 1992, any excretion level in the urine above 15 micrograms of uranium per

day should result in immediate medical testing, and when you get up to 250 micrograms of total uranium excreted per day, you're supposed to be under continuous medical care.

Finally the US Department of Energy performed a radiobioassay on me in November 1994, while I was director of the Depleted Uranium Project for the Department of Defense. My excretion rate was approximately 1500 micrograms per day. My level was 5 to 6 times beyond the level that requires continuous medical care.

But they didn't tell me for two and a half years.

Q: What are the symptoms of exposure to DU?

ROKKE: Fibromyalgia. Eye cataracts from the radiation. When uranium impacts any type of vehicle or structure, uranium oxide dust and pieces of uranium explode all over the place. This can be breathed in or go into a wound. Once it gets in the body, a portion of this stuff is soluble, which means it goes into the blood stream and all of your organs. The insoluble fraction stays—in the lungs, for example. The radiation damage and the particulates destroy the lungs.

Q: What kind of training have the troops had, who are getting called up right now—the ones being shipped to the vicinity of what may be the next Gulf War?

ROKKE: As the director of the Depleted Uranium Project, I developed a 40-hour block of training. All that curriculum has been shelved. They turned what I wrote into a 20-minute program that's full of distortions. It doesn't deal with the reality of uranium munitions.

The equipment is defective. The General Accounting Office verified that the gas masks leak, the chemical protective suits leak. Unbelievably, Defense Department officials recently said the defects can be fixed with duct tape.

Q: If my neighbors are being sent off to combat with equipment and training that is inadequate, and into battle with a toxic weapon, DU, who can speak up?

ROKKE: Every husband and wife, son and daughter, grandparent, aunt and uncle, needs to call their congressmen and cite

continued on next page

The Big Picture on Veterans' Health Care

BRUCE E. PARRY

We all know veterans have been promised health care by the military. We all know that the VA is closing down hospitals, programs and beds. We know that veterans are being charged more and more at every turn. We all know that the VA hospital system is understaffed, overworked and underpaid.

The questions that face us are the questions of what we do about it. I don't mean, "Are we going to have this demonstration, or that campaign?" "Are you going to get active?" or "Why are veterans so apathetic?" I mean rather, "What is our vision?" "How are we going to reverse the situation we face?" "How are we actually going to get the VA to not only stop closing down hospitals and programs, but to start opening new ones?" and "How are we going to get them to increase funding, increase service, reduce and eliminate costs to veterans and give them better health care?"

These are not trivial questions. Do we think that if we have enough demonstrations, the VA will relent? Do we think that if we send enough postcards, letters, emails and faxes, the secretary of Veterans Affairs will finally see the light? Do we think that if we

only elect the right people that the proper bill will come out of the Congress and be signed by the president? We may have to do all these things, but they are not going to solve the problem.

Here is why. The problem is not just the VA. Over the last 20 years, health care in this country has been cut back for all populations. The implementation of HMOs and "managed care" has meant both restricted service and rising health care and insurance bills across the country. At the same time, the Public Health Service has been severely cut back. In fact, all public hospitals have been cut back. A look around any major city will show that almost all hospitals are private and the few public hospitals remaining (like Chicago's Cook County Hospital) are woefully inadequate to handle the huge — and growing — population they have to serve.

Health care is big business. Private hospitals are in business to make money. So are the businesses that supply hospitals. So are the drug companies and the insurance companies.

The health care system in this country is not set up to answer the questions "How can we pro-

vide health care?" or "How can we provide the best health care to the most people?" It is set up to answer: "How can we make money by providing health care?" That is quite a different question.

They do not make it by working. The workers all go to work and do the best they can to do their jobs and get the wages and salaries.

Companies make it by making profits. And profits are made by getting others to do the work and supply the health care essentials for less than the company gets paid. That leads to cutting costs. It leads to only providing services that are profitable.

How does the private sector affect the VA and other public sector health care services?

Taxes are costs. You cut the cost of labor by cutting wages and laying people off. You cut taxes by lobbying Congress and the president to cut programs. Public health care programs, including the VA, have been cut severely by both Democrats and Republicans.

What's the point? The point is that in order to win, veterans are going to have to start linking up with the "civilians" fighting for health care. There are over 40 million people without any health

care in this country, and the number is growing. The veterans in that group naturally wind up in the VA system. That is a natural link between our fight and the broader fight for health care.

Another link is that we were actually promised something. Getting the government to provide what it promised would be a great victory for everyone. Plus, the VA is the backbone of the national health care system that would be activated in case of disaster or emergency. Everyone should be interested in that.

Demonstrations, postcards and letters are fine, but they are not going to win in the final analysis. We need to carefully look to forge a local and national movement that will get where we need to go.



BRUCE E. PARRY ACTS AS SECRETARY OF VETERANS FOR UNIFICATION, A GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATION FORMED IN 1998 WITH THE MISSION TO SAVE THE VA HOSPITAL SYSTEM AND RESTORE QUALITY CARE AND BENEFITS FOR ALL VETERANS. YOU CAN REACH VU AT 773-569-1000 OR VETERANSFORUNIFICATION@YAHOO.COM BRUCE IS ALSO A MEMBER OF VVAW.

The War Against Ourselves

continued from page 20

these official government reports and force the military to ensure that our troops have adequate equipment and adequate training. If we don't take care of our American veterans after a war, as happened with the Gulf War, and now we're about ready to send them into a war again — we can't do it. We can't do it. It's a crime against God. It's a crime against humanity to use uranium munitions in a war, and it's devastating to ignore the consequences of war.

These consequences last for eternity. The half life of uranium 238 is 4.5 billion years. And we left over 320 tons all over the place in Iraq.

We also bombarded Vieques, Puerto Rico, with DU in preparation for the war in Kosovo. That's affecting American citizens on American territory. When I tried to activate our team from the Department of Defense responsible for radiological safety and DU

cleanup in Vieques, I was told no. When I tried to activate medical care, I was told no.

The US Army made me their expert. I went into the project with the total intent to ensure they could use uranium munitions in war, because I'm a warrior. What I saw as director of the project, doing the research and working with my own medical conditions and everybody else's, led me to one conclusion: uranium munitions must be banned from the planet, for eternity, and medical care must be provided for everyone, not just the US or the Canadians or the British or the Germans or the French but for the American citizens of Vieques, for the residents of Iraq, of Okinawa, of Scotland, of Indiana, of Maryland, and now Afghanistan and Kosovo.

Q: If your information got out widely, do you think there's a possibility that the families of those soldiers would beg them to

refuse?

ROKKE: If you're going to be sent into a toxic wasteland, and you know you're going to wear gas masks and chemical protective suits that leak, and you're not going to get any medical care after you're exposed to all of these things, would you go? Suppose they gave a war and nobody came. You've got to start peace sometime.

Q: It does sound remarkable for someone who has been in the military for 35 years to be talking about when peace should begin.

ROKKE: When I do these talks, especially in churches, I'm reminded that these religions say, "And a child will lead us to peace." But if we contaminate the environment, where will the child come from? The children won't be there. War has become obsolete, because we can't deal with the consequences on our warriors or the environment, but more important, on the noncombatants. When you reach a point in war when the contamination and the

health effects of war can't be cleaned up because of the weapons you use, and medical care can't be given to the soldiers who participated in the war on either side or to the civilians affected, then it's time for peace.



SUNNY MILLER'S INTERVIEW WAS ORIGINALLY BROADCAST ON WMFO (BOSTON) IN NOVEMBER 2002 AND IS AVAILABLE FOR RE-BROADCAST AT: WWW.TRAPROCKPEACE.ORG

For more information on DU:

WISE Uranium Project
www.antenna.nl/wise/uranium/

National Gulf War
Resource Center
www.ngwrc.org

Veterans for Common Sense
www.veteransforcommonsense.org

Lynda Van Devanter (1947-2002)

Lynda Van Devanter Buckley, an advocate for women veterans, died November 15, 2002 at her home in Herndon, Virginia, after a long illness. She was 55.

An Arlington native, she served in Vietnam in 1969 and 1970 as a surgical nurse with the 71st Evacuation Hospital in Pleiku, near the Cambodian border.

Her acclaimed memoir, "Home Before Morning," was the first widely-published book by a female veteran on the Vietnam War. It described her experience of the horrors of the war and was

among the first to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), from which she suffered. She wrote that she and other nurses and doctors took to drinking, drug use and sexual liaisons to find distraction. The book, co-authored by Christopher Morgan, was inspiration for the TV drama "China Beach," which ran from 1988 to 1991.

One of her letters was included in the 1988 HBO documentary "Dear America: Letters Home From Vietnam." In it, she described a Christmas Eve of amputations and death for

wounded GIs.

"This is now the seventh month of death, destruction and misery. I'm tired of going to sleep listening to outgoing and incoming rockets, mortars and artillery. I'm sick of facing, every day, a new bunch of children ripped to pieces," she wrote.

In 1979 she helped launch and became head of the Vietnam Veterans of America Women's Project. In 1987 the VVA honored her with the Excellence in the Arts Award and in 2002 she received a VVA Commendation Medal. After retiring in 1984 she

continued to write articles, edit volumes of poetry, give speeches and conduct seminars.

Mrs. Buckley suffered from systemic collagen vascular disease, which she attributed to war-time exposure to chemical agents and pesticides.

Survivors include her husband, Tom Buckley, and their daughter Molly; a stepdaughter, Brigid Buckley; her mother, Helen Van Devanter; and four sisters.



Home Before Morning

For Lynda Van Devanter (1947-2002)

If life were fair, you'd be a millionaire, ambassador to somewhere really cool like New Orleans, Tahiti, or the Ritz, maybe the empress of everything — not some female Job for all the world Almighty God just seemed to have it in for: pass one test of faith and here's another. And another. Yet one more. Suffer, suffer, die. Okay, we both learned far too young that nothing's fair in life, that's just the way it is, there's no use *whining*. And you never did complain. Not when your lungs were so congested that you couldn't hold a conversation. Not when your legs swelled up so badly that you couldn't walk a hundred feet. Not when your joints began to fail. And then your kidneys, too. And all the while you just kept hoping, struggling to go on another day, another month, another year with Tom and Molly, with your husband and your daughter. How you loved them fiercely with the burden of the knowledge of those far too many broken boys you had to fix and couldn't, boys too young to have the chance to demonstrate against the war that killed them, to be an alcoholic, to get sober, to be an advocate for broken souls, a witness to the worst and best we are, to marry, make a child, write a book, call me late at night to say you're frightened and you need to hear another voice who's frightened by the posturing of presidents and statesmen who have never hear the sound of teenaged soldiers crying for their mothers. Great-hearted woman, may the broken boys you tried to fix and couldn't, find you now and guide you safely home before morning.



Lynda Van Devanter served as a US Army nurse in Vietnam in 1969-70. She was author of the memoir "Home Before Morning."

— W.D. Ehrhart

Michael L. Reed (1947-2002)

Michael L. Reed, 54, beloved husband, father, brother, son and friend, died October 19, 2002 in his home in Fayetteville, Arkansas peacefully and with grace as God intended. Michael was born in Topeka, Kansas on Oct. 22, 1947 to Patricia and Charles Reed. They moved to San Diego when Mike was one year old and he grew up near his beloved ocean. He faced death as he did life: with strength, courage, humility, humor and grace. Through his example he taught so many how to treasure the gift of life and love,

how to "Be Here Now."

Michael had many jobs during his time with us: silversmith, wheel man, tie-dyer, artist, cook, house painter, asphalt stripper and just whatever needed to be done. He also had many loves: surfing, skateboards, magic, puppets, St. Jude, dumpster-diving, flowers, fishing, reading, music, good food and anything south of the border; but above all these was his love for his family.

Michael was a magical person, part coyote and all prankster. Michael never said goodbye; he

always said: *May the long-time sun shine upon you, all love surround you, and the pure light within you guide your way on.*

He was a Vietnam veteran and a proud member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. He liked to say he was born in Kansas, was raised in San Diego, and grew up in Vietnam.

Michael is survived by his wife, Rachel Garcia; his daughter Alanna Reed of Austin, Texas; his son Shane Reed who is in the Air Force in Little Rock; his brother Kevin Reed, sister-in-law Lisa and

their daughters Heather and Theresa of Murrayville, Illinois; and many friends who loved him like family.

To all those who knew Mike, please take a moment this day to tell someone you love them, or to smell a beautiful flower, or to just fully appreciate the life you have been given. He will be missed and never forgotten, in our hearts forever. *Vaya con Dios, Michael.*

Rachel Garcia



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Letter From Vietnam

WILLIAM KELLY

Analogies, like war, can be dangerous. However, being in Vietnam during this period in our nation's history and being a combat veteran of the American War in Vietnam forces one to see some similarities.

25 February, Thanh Phong, Ben Tre Province. On this date, 34 years ago, a special team of American warriors was sent on a mission to "snatch" a Viet Cong political cadre. Thanh Phong was, and is, a dirt poor hamlet on a finger-like peninsula in the Mekong Delta. The mission took place at night in a hamlet without electricity. The SEAL team involved might not even have had an interpreter along. Due to the subsequent celebrity value of the name of one of the participants, the mission created a great outpouring of commentary. Very little real reporting.

The result, whether accidental, intentional or somewhere in between, seemed to be foreordained. Twenty-one Vietnamese civilians, mostly women and children, were annihilated in a massive barrage of small-arms fire. All indications point to a mission of the CIA's parallel war termed

the Phoenix Program.

As our nation's nebulous war on terrorism proceeds, we should be aware of these types of missions that are probably being conducted at this very moment throughout the world. Shadowy, no "in-beds" along, no results shown. Our terror will counter our opponent's terror. If you can't get the principal, get the family! Is there a relativity to morality?

16 March, My Lai, Quang Ngai Province. This date was the 35th anniversary of the massacre perpetrated by an American unit. 504 civilians were brutally murdered. This was not a momentary madness but an ongoing assault that lasted nearly four hours! Too long for hot-blooded anger. For myself and many other grunts, this one incident stands out as the single least understandable of all the horrific incidents arising from our involvement in Vietnam.

Since my first return to Vietnam in 1998, I have planned my annual stay to encompass this date. Six years in succession. Given my Irish romanticism and sentimentality, I always arrive bearing 504 multi-hued roses to honor the victims. Quang Ngai was, and is, still

renowned as the font of the revolution. Yet I have always been welcomed with friendship. Not, ever, one iota of hostility.

The day has become something akin to a tradition for me and a growing number of Viets, mostly young students and workers but some oldtimers as well. After we pay our respects and say our prayers, the ever-burgeoning group proceeds to the beautiful beach at My Khe and an afternoon lunch and a swim. It is oddly comforting to me and, I think, to my Vietnamese friends.

20 March, Hanoi. I arrived at my lodging in this beautiful, charming capitol of Vietnam to be apprised by the ubiquitous CNN that bombs had begun to fall on Baghdad. Eerie! To walk the streets of this compact, densely-populated city and to think of what it might have felt like to be an inhabitant when a massive bombing campaign was underway certainly saddened me and caused me to think of the fate of the Iraqi population of Baghdad.

I can draw no conclusions. No insights. But the ironies and similarities abound.

Today, when in Vietnam, I

feel safe, free and at peace. Oddly, at home! By no stretch of the imagination could I envision ever wielding arms against the Vietnamese people who are now a part of my family. To understand this feeling of kinship, I can draw a conclusion. The Viets are no longer the Other. I have met real people who, apart from our cultural and historical differences, are the same as myself. One is forced to ponder the present Other, the Arab and Muslim. If I could meet and live with them, within their culture and civilization, would the shared humanity trump all the differences?



WILLIAM KELLY WAS A PLATOON LEADER WITH A GRUNT OUTFIT IN I CORPS BASED IN QUANG NGAI PROVINCE. HE BELONGS TO THE VVAW, VVA, VFP AND OTHER GROUPS. EVERY YEAR, SINCE 1998, HE HAS BEEN RETURNING TO VIETNAM AND HELPING OUT AT SHELTERS FOR STREET KIDS AND ORPHANS. IN 2001 HE FINANCED THE CONSTRUCTION OF A COMMUNITY CENTER IN BU DANG, BINH PHUOC PROVINCE. LATELY HE HAS BEEN BUILDING HOUSES, ONE BY ONE, IN THANH PHONG, BEN TRE PROVINCE.

Songs of Protest

BILL HOMANS

I was always known as the VVAW musician. That's me singing and playing the harmonica at the end of the Winter Soldier documentary. Throughout a life of some political activism and lots of grunt labor and driving dirty diesel trucks, I have always played the blues. I only work for a living; music is what I do for a life.

So when my old friend from the days of the original VVAW, the great activist musician Barbara Dane, asked me to play for an event in New York City called "Songs of Protest: The Vietnam Songbook," acceptance was a no-brainer. Barbara and I had been back in touch since 2001, when she had played at Oklahoma's "Dusk to Dawn Blues Festival" at Rentiesville. She might be 75, but this is a woman whose fire has never diminished. Now, I'm a musician and artist of no great reputation, but Barbara Dane is my greatest fan, and that said, I can pass on knowing I must have played something worthwhile.

Friday night, February 28, when I got to the lobby of the

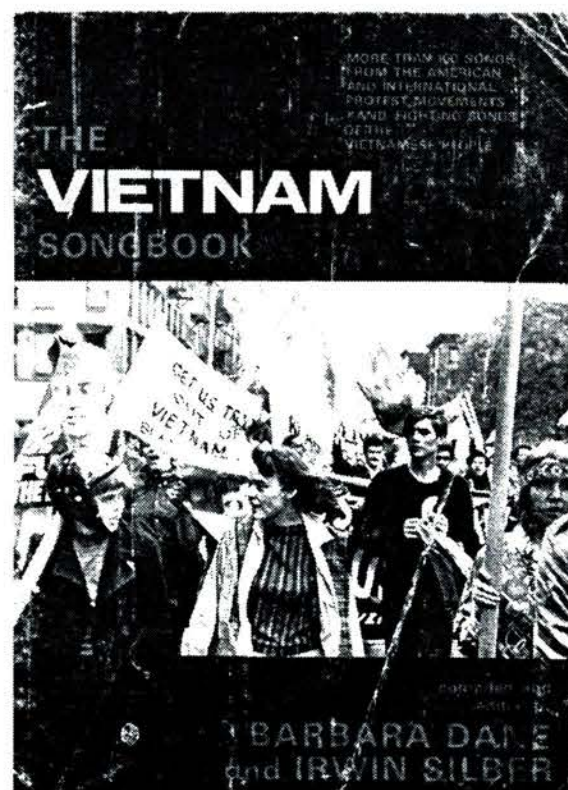
Washington Square Hotel, down in Greenwich Village, the night man told me people were awaiting me in the bar and pointed the way. Wonder who that can be, I thought. When I got there, I knew this was gonna work: it was Barbara Dane, with a wide, bulletheaded fellow I took for her husband, Irwin Silber, the legendary publisher of *Sing Out!* magazine, which captured the musical activism of the 1960s. Silber and Dane were the publishers, in 1969, of the original "Vietnam Songbook," a comprehensive collection of songs in vehement opposition to the Vietnam War, by Phil Ochs and Tom Paxton, Nina Simone and Richard Farina, Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, and many more.

Wrong! It was my old VVAW brother Joe Bangert, who, with me, was to provide the VVAW presence at the big gig. Joe is cutting-edge hardcore; he spent five years in the 1990s living with the Vietnamese in Hanoi. That's right, y'all, the Vietnamese. Not the "North" or "South"

Vietnamese; the Vietnamese. You remember that old expression from the 'Nam, "It don't mean nothin'"? Well, thirty-some years later, it does mean something. That, at least, we can say we accomplished, brothers: Vietnam is one country again. Right on.

The booze is good but expensive in New York City. After hugs, and toasts to Vietnam, the VVAW and ourselves (for staying on the path for enough decades for our hair to get gray), we were off to bed.

Saturday night, promoters Kim Rancourt and Don Fleming — the two New York activist-musicians who had drawn us all together to show the people of 2003 how the anti-war music of the 60s and early 70s had evolved, and yet retained its soul and core — met me in Joe's Pub. Nice



joint. Hope we fill it, fellas, I'm thinking. Back in the dressing room, it was clear that (regardless of what I had been assured) the band didn't actually know my songs. These are top-of-the-line players, though, with credits from Blodwyn Pig and Luna through

continued on next page

An Open Letter From the Troops You Support

To whom it should concern,

We do not believe that supporting the war is analogous to supporting soldiers. Support for the war, contrary to intuition, is support for disenfranchisement; robbing us of our basic economic and moral agency through endangerment of our persons. This is an inevitability of institutional conflict; some citizen is going to have to make the sacrifice to go and do the actual fighting. However, the fact that many soldiers embrace this choice does not justify the institutional conflict itself. As US soldiers, we recognize that our decision to fulfill our duty is a necessary sacrifice for the cause of federal republican government. We also recognize that what we really fight, and possibly die for, is a goal not in the hands of the human giving his life, but in the vote of the people determining his or her fate.

A soldier is a human tool. A soldier in the US Army is a seminal vessel of corporate and political desire forcing the course of an entire era of human development and directive. We were US citizens prior to our enlistment oath; since then we have become something greater and lesser, citizen-soldiers. We have given up a portion of rights and freedoms in an oath to serve an institution whose sole official purpose is the protection of all rights and freedoms given to any citizen. Whatever an individual soldier's personal motivation behind making their oath, the justification for their decision is the well-founded rationale of public service. The citizen-soldier is a volunteer, and it is a position that serves by being a surrogate of the public will. Despite the obedience to the commander-in-chief, despite our direct accountability to Congress, the will of the public is sovereign over all aspects of military activity.

The only justification that allows for the existence of the US Army, as a standing policing force equally active in both peace and wartime, comes from a matter of governance. No other precedence in American history, not real or imagined enemies, not current or possible threats, not academic or political ideals; none of these stands above the level of excuse for confusion or abuse of power, save the singular saving grace of public accountability. The Army's existence is only acceptable as a vehicle of public interest, as an institution in direct service to the people of the United States. The implied complaint here is embodied in the following question; whose will is being done in the current use of the US military infrastructure? Can the public even

be understood as sovereign when we find ourselves lost over even basic facts about the "War"; namely what our true motivation in the matter is, who are really our desired targets, and how we expect to benefit from any of our current actions?

The most fundamental complaint is not that this war is happening, because despite unilateral economic motivations and searing blind aggression, Saddam is truly an abusive totalitarian dictator. The real problem is that no one cares about the former assertions, and everyone moves sedately and directly to the latter exception. The point is that it does not matter to anyone that the war as a whole is unjust, self-destructive, and abusive simply because one of its auxiliary conclusions is beneficial. If we don't evaluate the place in history we are at and simply let the powers that currently set the agenda to continue to direct the public mindset further and further from debate and towards complacent acceptance, then we risk losing sight of the fact that the actions and precedents our nation takes now are overturning a century of international focus and assistance. While the fates and welfare of all humanity becomes more and more intertwined, our current leaders wish to make us more exploitative, reactionary, and isolationist. We must come to terms with the fact that this is an outcome we cannot accept, and that every life on this planet will be made worse because of it. The only way to prevent this situation is to stop accepting the decisions and rationalizations of the present enfranchised leaders.

We ask you to stand up and act now. Responsibility for our common welfare is not limited to the professional politicians. They may represent us, but they also rely on us. As citizens and, more importantly, consumers the course of national and international policy is ultimately determined by our shared will. Shake off your apathy and exercise your rights and duties as Americans to ensure a better future. **Speak out, any way you know how and any way you can. Do this before your lives are irrevocably changed, as have ours already, because you will feel the consequences of today's decisions all too acutely tomorrow.**

Todd Arena
Jonathan Hustad
Members of the US Army Reserve

Songs of Protest

continued from page 24

Sonic Youth. You can go to www.Vietnamsongbook.org to see pictures and read about all of 'em. [And you can download some mp3 tracks from the evening, including two songs sung by Joe Bangert. —Ed.] And of course Pete Seeger and Tuli Kupferburg (The Fugs) were also there. This crowd was getting its money's worth!

It was a lucky thing that there were two shows. The first set we did the numbers I had selected from my original 1973 album, "Merry Airbrakes," "Draft Board Blues" and Woody Guthrie's "Vigilante Man," held together with baling wire, duct tape and charisma, leaving Barbara Dane to pull the first SRO crowd back into the zone with her a cappella street demo holler, "Insubordination." During the break I got the

guys together and let Sonic Youth bass player Jim O'Rourke know it was on him to lead us. Then, at the urging of Jenny Muldaur (that's right, Geoff and Maria's daughter, with whom I got to blow harp on Donovan's "Universal Soldier"), I showed them how the songs needed to be done.

Numbah one thou. After Joe Bangert had taken the crowd to Vietnam with "The Ballad of Ho Chi Minh" and "Giai Phong Mien Nam" ("Liberate the South," the NVA march song) and Lenny Kaye from Patti Smith's group had electrified them again with a driving, edgy reading of Dylan's "Masters of War," the crowd was ready, and so was the band. This time we really smoked 'em. I'm eager to hear the tapes.

Before Barbara Dane led us all in the last, climactic reading of

"Insubordination," our brother from the Universal Human Rights Coalition, Vietnam veteran and former Black Panther Noble I'm Manu-El-Bey, poetically warned the crowd of the danger of trusting leaders, such as the ones we have now. He said:

"Beware the leader who bangs the drums of war to whip the citizenry into a patriotic fervor, for patriotism is indeed a two-edged sword. It both emboldens the blood and narrows the mind.

"And when the drums of war have reached a fever pitch, and the blood boils with hate, and the mind is closed, the leader will not need to seize the rights of the citizenry. Rather, the citizenry, infused with fear and blinded by patriotism, will offer up their rights to the leader, and gladly so. How do I know?

"For this is what I have done. And I am Caesar."

We left the crowd on its feet

and in the zone. Over the next two days, Joe Bangert and I were interviewed by the Alan Lomax Archive. Our lives in the VVAW and beyond — and my recorded musical legacy — are now part of an exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution.

Joe and I are two VVAW guys who always knew that we were actors in history. Monday evening, on the plane heading back to Oklahoma and my dirty old rolloff dumpster truck, I knew it was official.



BILL HOMANS, AKA WATERMELON SLIM, WAS MASSACHUSETTS STATE COORDINATOR FOR VVAW IN 1971-74. HIS 1973 ALBUM, "MERRY AIRBRAKES," WAS THE ONLY ALBUM EVER TO BE RELEASED BY A VIETNAM VETERAN DURING THE WAR. HOMANS' LATEST CD IS "BIG SHOES TO FILL"; SAMPLES AND MORE INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND AT WWW.FRIEDOKRAJONES.COM.

Letters to the Editor

My father was a vet, who served in the USAF in 1971-72 in Vietnam. Decorated with a Purple Heart and Bronze Star, honorably discharged. I am very proud of the many accomplishments he achieved in his short life (he passed away due to HIV in 1990) and very proud to call all of you my fellow countrymen and women.

I write this letter to speak out to someone who shares a similar view as I over the escalating war in the Middle East. Though my father enlisted to serve his country, he did not agree with the government's reasoning on why we were in Vietnam. I have been instilled, by him, with the notion that no war is a good thing, regardless of the motive or justification. Knowing him the way I got to know him, as a friend as well as a dad, I KNOW in my heart that he would be as much — if not more — opposed to this war as I myself.

I'm tired of being spoon-fed rhetoric by the media and supposed patriots, who believe waving the flag in my face and going along with whatever they are told is patriotic. I honestly believe speaking out and standing up for what I believe is right IS the patriotic thing to do. I've been told many times in the last few weeks the classic "LOVE IT OR LEAVE IT" and keep my same retort of "If I don't love it, I'd rather change it. THAT is what democracy is all about."

It's nice to know that there are people like all of you out there still standing up for what you believe in and you can back it with facts and experience, instead of "It's what I heard on FOX."

I would be interested in joining your organization if you accept

children of vets. I myself have never spent any time in the armed services (probably due to the fact that I saw the way Vietnam vets were treated by the government upon their return, and watched friends of mine go through similar situations during the Gulf War, Part I) but am an American willing to speak my views on the way I believe this great country should be run.

I have the utmost respect for ALL veterans and even more for the POWs/MIAs that I will NEVER forget. (I have the emblem tattooed on my left shoulder) and would be honored to be a part of your organization. I spent much of my preteens volunteering time at our local Vietnam Vets Outreach Center, here in Queens NYC.

Please let me know if it is possible for me to join the ranks of the true American heroes.

I want to work to bring all of our men and women home from this war as soon as possible. To embrace and thank them for doing their job, regardless of my opinions on what their "bosses" tell them is right. And to bring every current and past POW/MIA home.

I thank you all for your time, service and undying passion to doing the right thing.

Peace & Love,
Tony Georges III
Woodhaven, NY

My heart is breaking, guys. I work near the Wall in DC, and go there once in a while to visit Capt. Casey, Chris and Lance. If our country did not learn from our Vietnam experience, then these good men died in vain. That really hurts.

My country did not learn that there are consequences for foreign policy decisions. The results of our Vietnam involvement and 9/11 are consequences.

We did not learn that military technology is never a substitute for diplomacy and making the effort to understand the other guys' thinking. Don't we know by now that the technology that makes atomic weapons, global positioning systems, Stinger missiles, and AK-47s possible is very easily transferable and copied?

Finally, it is the soldier who suffers. Many of us bought off on the big lie — that men fought and died in earlier wars to pay for our freedom. It may have been true of the American Revolution, and certainly of World War II, but to apply this thinking to any confrontational situation is ludicrous. It is as monstrous a lie as the obligation to *jihad* among Arabic people.

It will be interesting to see if those who have egged on this war

are as enthusiastic about taking care of the scarred and maimed veterans. My son is a disabled vet (not in war) and cannot use the vocational rehabilitation to which he is entitled because his family cannot go without health insurance while he's in school.

Tying this war to 9/11 is the cheapest of political tricks. I would have expected as much from W, but I am extremely disappointed in our elected representatives. Is Tom Daschle the only one willing to speak the truth? Senator Kerry, get up and open your mouth; your fellow vets want to hear from you.

We need to do all we can to see that the spineless do not take over our country. We need to take back our flag. It will not stand for neo-fascism and international injustice. Also, we will not allow them to use the name of God and to usurp religion to support their madness. We do this by taking any opportunity to be heard. I look forward to joining you good people.

Douglas Nelson
371st Radio Research Co, 1st Air Cav VN 1968

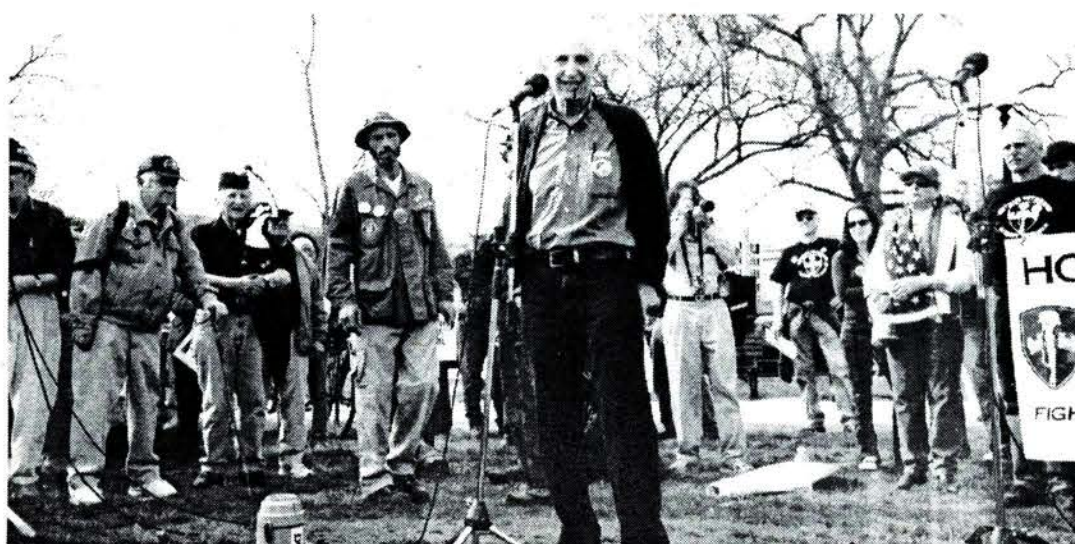
I am an uncompensated disabled Desert Storm combat veteran. Let me address ALL of you Vietnam veterans when I say THANK YOU! Not only for your outstanding sacrifices in Vietnam, but for your ever-endearing dedication to the true America with your representation of the awful atrocities of war by trying to stop war itself and the Bush regime.

We all owe you so much, but mostly it is us, the younger veterans, that owe you and your fallen brethren our lives and future. For you have taught us how to stay alive in combat. You have taught us how to stay alive (harder than in combat) here at home with our families and

our many, many disabling postwar problems. You have forged honorable paths through the crippled VA system.

And now, here, you represent the truth of what war really is and sacrifice yet again a part of yourselves to educate the sheep of America just how wars and the media are manipulated by the politicians who need war for their political gains. Thank you.

Yours in honor and respect,
Richard Pinkerton



Daniel Ellsberg, Operation Dire Distress - Washington, D.C. March 21, 2003.

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, including 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 also took up the struggle for the rights and needs of veterans. In 1970, we began the first rap groups to deal with traumatic after-effects of war, setting the example for readjustment counseling at Vet Centers today. 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 still finances and arms undemocratic and repressive regimes around the world in the name of "democracy." American troops have again been sent into open battle in the Middle East and covert actions in Latin America, for many of the same misguided reasons that were used to send us to Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, many veterans from all eras are still denied justice — facing unemployment, discrimination, homelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder and other health problems, while already inadequate services are 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 future generations 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. Anyone who supports this overall effort, whether Vietnam veteran or not, veteran or not, may join us in this long term struggle. JOIN US!

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 U.S. aggression in Vietnam as well as its cost in human lives. The original MACV insignia also put forward lies. The U.S. military was not protecting (the sword) the Vietnamese from invasion from the People's Republic of China (the China Gates), 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 more than 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 individuals calling themselves "Vietnam Veterans Against the War Anti-Imperialist." Though few in number, they are highly mobile and may show up at meetings or demonstrations representing themselves as VVAW.

"VVAW AI" is not a faction, caucus or part of VVAW, Inc. They are not affiliated with us in any way. "VVAW AI" is actually the creation of an obscure ultra-left sect known as the Revolutionary Communist Party and is designed to pimp off VVAW's long history of struggle. 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!**

SUPPORT VVAW!

DONATE OR JOIN TODAY!

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.
VVAW Membership
P.O. Box 2065, Station A
Champaign, IL 61825-2065

Membership Application

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

E-mail address _____

Dates of Service (if applicable) _____

Branch _____

Unit _____

Overseas Duty _____

Dates _____

Military Occupation _____

Rank _____

☐ Yes, add me to the VVAW e-mail list

☐ I do not wish to join, but wish to make a donation to the work of VVAW

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 (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.

Signature _____

Date _____

Total Amount Enclosed _____

(Make checks payable to VVAW. Contributions are tax-deductible.)

RECOLLECTIONS

Frequently Asked Questions

PAUL WISOVATY

A few years ago, I was interviewed by the *Decatur Herald & Review* in regard to a local PBS documentary in which Barry Romo and I had participated entitled "Vietnam Veterans' Stories." At one point the reporter asked me if I'd ever had any PTSD problems. "No, not at all," said I, quite comfortable that my mental state had survived a round with the 3/5 Armored Cavalry. But I had an afterthought, which I shared with her, and which she apparently found interesting enough to use as the lead for her story. You may decide that for yourselves.

A couple of years before that, I had taken my 16-year-old daughter to see "Forrest Gump." I was enjoying the show, and even got through the Vietnam parts without too much trouble. (Coincidentally, Gump was in my old unit, the 9th Infantry Division.) Then we got to the part in which Gump is reunited with Lieutenant Dann, his old platoon leader who lost both legs in combat. They hit a couple of bars (Dann drinking heavily, Gump just caretaking), had an unproductive bout with a couple of prostitutes, and wound up back in a bar just as the chimes rang out midnight on New Year's Eve. Everybody in the bar was singing and wearing party hats, and generally feeling about as

thrilled to be alive as ten or twelve beers can make you. Finally the camera focused on Lt. Dann, who was staring out into space and very clearly thinking, "My life is just total, total, total shit."

That did it. I started to cry, and my daughter, who was obviously a lot more mature than I had been at her age (or maybe am today), said, "Daddy, do you want to leave?" I nodded, and decided to walk outside for a few minutes to get my act together before going back in.

That never happened. We walked out of the theater, on a warm, sunny July afternoon, and encountered dozens of adults and kids walking toward us. They parted like the goddamn Red Sea. They saw this fifty-year-old guy crying and howling and looking (sorry, Barry) real postal, and I never saw so many mothers grab kids into their arms at one time since "Titanic." Through it all, Brittany just held onto my arm. When we got to the car, she decided that this was a perfect time to try out her new driver's license. Good decision.

I think there are a couple of points to this story.

First, I was lucky enough to have my incredibly empathetic daughter with me. I was also lucky to have a very understanding wife

at home when we got there. But what about all the 'Nam vets who saw "Forrest Gump" or "Platoon" or "Apocalypse Now" and didn't have those resources? Where was their solace?

Second, my post-'Nam life has not been entirely a bust. I don't make a whole lot of money, and nobody has asked me to run for public office (as a Democrat in Douglas County, that wouldn't be a very successful plan anyway), but I do have a job, and enough things I'm involved in to keep that Ghost of Vietnam outside my back door. This is going to sound either moderately impressive or just downright stupid, but I've been president of Kiwanis, chairman of the Salvation Army, and commander of the VFW. I've even been (if I'm lyin' I'm dyin') Moose of the Year twice. In other words, like I said, I've kept busy. That helps. I do spend some time around the bar, but unlike poor old Lt. Dann, I don't have enough time on my hands to make a lifestyle out of it. My point is: what if I didn't have those things to help convince me I've finally got my shit straight? What if I were, well, Lt. Dann?

Let's wrap this up.

If I had an ounce of a brain, I'd be over at Danville VA asking a shrink about that Gump experi-

ence. I'd tell him about Lt. DiNapoli, my old commo lieutenant who got blown up when his jeep hit a mine, about a day after he'd chewed my ass out for something I swore I'd never forgive him for. (I deserved it.) I'd tell him about Frank Scharlau, my old 'Nam buddy I wrote to a couple of years ago who never wrote back, and I keep wondering why. I'd tell him how much I'd love to see Rusty Hammond and Art Macias and Andy Anderson and Al Bokor again, not to tell old war stories, but to ask them the same questions all of us have nagging at us thirty-five years later: "Was I a good soldier? Did you trust me to cover your ass? Am I forgiven if I didn't?"

But I probably won't. I'll just go to the next Chamber of Commerce Thanksgiving luncheon, and maybe they'll give me another award for running the Christmas Kettle Drive. That'll make it all OK. I won't need to ask myself those questions again for a while.



PAUL WISOVATY IS A MEMBER OF VVAW. HE LIVES IN TUSCOLA, ILLINOIS, WHERE HE WORKS AS A PROBATION OFFICER. HE WAS IN VIETNAM WITH THE US ARMY 9TH DIVISION IN 1968.



Feb 6 2003

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