



THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

50¢

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The Struggle Continues

The election is now over, and the Bush regime has been given four more years to carry out its openly antidemocratic and pro-imperialist policies. People are looking to see how we in VVAW are going to respond to the situation that results from this quadrennial event. But there should be no surprises for anyone who has followed our history.

VVAW was first established in 1967, in the midst of “our” war and during the Democratic administration of Lyndon Johnson. We have continued our struggle for peace, social justice and better treatment for veterans of all eras during every political administra-

tion since then. No political party gets a free pass from us, Democrat or Republican. A Republican win does not demoralize us, and a Democratic win would not have lulled us into complacency.

We fought our way through the repressive years of the Nixon administration, and we survived. We have continued our struggles through every successive administration, no matter what they threw at us. Our victories in helping to end the Vietnam war and in bringing about the recognition of Agent Orange effects and PTSD cannot be denied. VVAW was at the forefront in all of these efforts, when the so-called “Swift Boat

Veterans for Truth” were doing nothing whatsoever to help veterans. And remember, Nixon won by a landslide in 1972 and was out of office in two years.

With every new war, VVAW is joined by new generations of veterans who have decided to work for an end to the injustices that produce war. We have made a conscious decision to stick around and continue the fight for you, the veterans of all eras. With this in mind, we actively support the newly-formed Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW).

We in VVAW have always taken the long view. We recognize that the fight for peace and real

social justice does not end with this or that political administration. All you need to do is take a trip through Howard Zinn’s “People’s History of the United States” and you will see veterans and GIs from every era, Revolutionary War to the present, in the forefront of struggle. This is our tradition, and politicians of whatever stripe in whatever office should be on notice that we are not going to fade away.

The end of the election is only the beginning of the next stage in this continuing struggle. Join us!



Vets Join Protests at RNC

DAVID CLINE

At the end of July, the Republican National Convention (RNC) was held in New York City to showcase the renomination of George W. Bush in a cynical attempt to play off the pain, loss, fear and anger caused by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

In response, there were a series of mass mobilizations, civil disobedience actions and other protests against the Bush agenda of pre-emptive war and assaults on social programs and civil liberties.

Large numbers of veterans and military families participated in some of these demonstrations. Members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War took part in several actions, detailed in the following report.

THE WORLD SAYS “NO” TO THE BUSH AGENDA

On Sunday, August 29, the day before the RNC began, hundreds of thousands of people flooded the streets of Manhattan to say “no” to the Bush agenda of war, greed, hate and lies. For weeks prior to the march, the mayor and the NYPD denied the United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) organizers a march route to and rally site in Central Park, claiming that the presence of an expected 250,000 demonstrators would damage the



Mike Hoffman and Rob Sarra of Iraq Veterans Against the War

lawn. After weeks of negotiations it was agreed that the march could pass before Madison Square Garden (site of the RNC) but then must proceed down the west side of Manhattan to a barren stretch of highway for the post-march rally.

UFPJ refused to accept this, and the mayor stalled until the last minute, hoping that the uncertainty of the parade route and an accompanying media barrage warning of possible terrorist attack and predicting “anarchist violence” would deter many from participating in the march. Instead, when demonstrators began gathering on 7th Avenue for the march, the crowd grew to 500,000 — twice

the number organizers had expected.

A contingent of veterans and military families assembled

behind the lead banners, and as more and more appeared, it became clear that this was the biggest contingent of veterans to join any of the recent anti-war demonstrations. Many Veterans for Peace and VVAW members wore identifying shirts and hats and displayed banners. Other vets wore VFW, Legion and DAV caps. Many wore their old uniforms and military medals. A group of surviving Lincoln Brigade vets unfurled their colors.

A large group of Military Families Speak Out (MFSO) members carried pictures of loved ones serving in war zones. A contingent of Gold Star mothers and fathers marched in grim witness to the losses they had suffered from Bush’s folly in Iraq.

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PO Box 408594
Chicago, IL 60640
www.vvaw.org
vvaw@vvaw.org

From the National Office

BARRY ROMO

VVAW is a lot stronger now than it was a year and a half ago. We have around 400 new members, about half of which are old members coming home, but the others are new to the struggle. Some are folks in their fifties becoming active for the first time. And while 90% are Vietnam veterans, other new members are veterans of the Korean or Iraq wars. We also have people on active duty and in-country now, providing a voice for peace and justice from Iraq to the VA hospitals.

Our website (www.vvaw.org) receives about 13,000 visits per month these days. The list of people willing to be VVAW regional contacts has expanded greatly. We've also revived our military counseling program.

We want the bombs to stop falling, the GIs to stop dying, and Americans to stop killing Iraqis. We want the VA to be expanded. We want every vet to be able to walk into a hospital and be cared for, not put off for six months to two years. We want more than just

an expansion of cemeteries.

Tall order, yes — but we helped end the war in Vietnam and Laos and Cambodia with Nixon as president.

We were walking point on post-traumatic stress disorder and Agent Orange without law degrees or a big budget while the establishment said we were being crybabies or spreading communist propaganda.

This country is a different place — a better place — and VVAW made a difference. And

you can too. Join us, re-up, become a contact.

No matter who gets elected, we're not going away. We've been around for 37 years. We didn't become discouraged when Nixon and Reagan were re-elected, and we didn't cut Carter or Clinton any slack. A lot of promises have been made and now must be fulfilled.

VVAW is going to be around for a while.



BARRY ROMO IS A NATIONAL COORDINATOR OF VVAW.



Late 1960s VVAW demo in Washington, D.C.

Have old VVAW photos? The National Office would love to have them in our archives and for the website. Send us copies of the photos or mail us a CD with them scanned at 300 dpi. Please include captions with the year, event and participants if at all possible.

Thanks to Jeff Danziger, Vietnam veteran and political cartoonist, for his generous contributions to this issue. Thanks also to Billy Curmano for "Oxy, the Smart Bomb," and to John Zutz, Bob Gronko, George Weber, Elton Manzione, Alan Reilly and others for contributing photos.

Editorial Collective
 Barry Romo
 Joe Miller
 Jeff Machota
 Lisa Boucher

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- VVAW T-Shirt (L, XL, XXL) - \$12.00 _____
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Mail order and check to:
 VVAW
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 3550 E. Lunham Ave.
 St. Francis, WI 53235



Ship to:
 Name _____
 Address _____
 City, State, Zip _____

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc. National Contact List

For email addresses go to our website at www.vvaw.org.

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) 276-4189 or email vvaw@vvaw.org.

NATIONAL COORDINATORS

Barry Romo
(773) 276-4189
Pete Zastrow
(847) 864-3975
Joe Miller
(217) 328-2444
Bill Davis
(708) 386-1413
David Cline
(201) 876-0430
John Zutz
(414) 372-0749
Dave Kettenhofen
(414) 481-4614
Bill Perry
(215) 945-3350

NATIONAL STAFF

Bill Branson
David Curry
Jeff Machota
Lisa Boucher
Hannah Frisch

MILITARY COUNSELOR

Ray Parrish
(773) 561-VVAW

CONTACTS

Northwest AR
Dwayne Knox
(870) 428-5597
Arcata, CA
Brian Willson
bw@brianwillson.com
Southern CA
Leland Lubinsky
(909) 796-6565
Long Beach, CA
Horace Coleman
(562) 438-2818
Northern CA
David Ewing
(415) 781-8181

Central Coast, CA

Lane Anderson
(805) 564-2698

Brighton, CO

Charles Elliston
(303) 654-1754

Miami, FL

Patrick McCann
(301) 238-3361

Tallahassee, FL

Tom Baxter
(850) 893-7390

Athens, GA

Elton Manzione
(706) 369-0546

Chicago, IL

Barry Romo
(773) 276-4189

Oak Park, IL

Bill Davis
(708) 386-1413

Rockford, IL

Stanley Campbell
(815) 964-7111

Tuscola, IL

Paul Wisovaty
(217) 253-2157

Champaign-Urbana, IL

Joe Miller
(217) 328-2444

Richmond, IN

Chuck Yates
(765) 966-3221

Baton Rouge, LA

Ward Reilly
(225) 766-1364

New England

Jerry Lembcke
(408) 793-3050

Jackson, MI

Arnold Stieber
(734) 475-0740

Minnesota

Billy Curmano
(507) 864-2716

Mpls./St Paul, MN

John Anderson
(651) 485-8019

St. Louis, MO

David Curry
(314) 516-5042

New Jersey

David Cline
(201) 876-0430

Jersey Shore, NJ

Gerald Gioglio
geraldgioglio@go.com

Princeton, NJ

Annie Hirschman
(609) 430-0440

Albuquerque, NM

Bob Anderson
(505) 858-0882

Northwest NM

Joseph Knight
(505) 330-7713

Las Vegas, NV

Rena & John Kopystynski
(702) 399-8012

New York

Ben Chitty
(919) 779-1341

Cold Spring, NY

David Eisenhower
(514) 265-3495

Hudson Valley, NY

Jim Murphy
(845) 358-5709

Hudson Valley, NY

Dayl Wise
(718) 231-0616

Hudson Valley, NY

Mike Gillen
(914) 948-8983

Staten Island, NY

Ramon Rodriguez
(718) 447-0049

Olean, NY

Barry Miller
(716) 373-7019

Kent, OH

Brian Slease
(330) 676-0074

Columbus, OH

Mark Hartford
mzh@columbus.rr.com

Oklahoma

Bill Homans
(405) 227-4245

Waldport, OR

Ron Betts
(541) 563-3634

Emmaus, PA

David Shelly
(610) 967-2066

Levittown, PA

Bill Perry
(215) 945-3350

Philadelphia, PA

Jon Bjornson
(215) 438-8883

Chattanooga, TN

Fritz Efaw
(423) 425-4688

Austin, TX

Dave Collins
(830) 868-9055

San Antonio, TX

Tom Wetzler
(210) 533-4467

Virginia

Leigh Hauter
(703) 754-4005

Northern VA

Doug Nelson
(708) 848-3501

Seattle, WA

Mike Dedrick
(206) 328-5477

Milwaukee, WI

Bob Riggles
(414) 347-0109

Milwaukee, WI

Dave Kettenhofen
(414) 481-4614

Northern WI

Jay Tobin
(715) 832-1989



A field of 800 flags was placed near the SE Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Memorial Day, 2004

Fraggin'

BILL SHUNAS

Do you remember Herb Philbrick? Back in the Fifties there was a TV program called "I Led Three Lives." Each episode told the true stories of Herb Philbrick. His three lives were: (1) wonderful family man, (2) communist agent in the United States, and (3) FBI counterespionage man. (How is it that I can remember the name of a TV character from fifty years ago and can't remember the name of some relatives?) When the draft board sent me my notice for induction, I was old enough to not be enamored by the thought of going to war. Nevertheless I felt communism had to be stopped, and if my number was called, well ... like a John Wayne thing (the movie John Wayne, not the real person John Wayne), I had to go.

So why did I have this Cold Warrior mentality? What propaganda was lodged in the memory cells deep inside my brain? I'm sure one of the important ones was Herb Philbrick. For a couple of years there, every week Herb Philbrick busted another dangerous commie cell. Just think, if Herb busted all those cells and other FBI agents were doing the same thing and it was probable that they couldn't get every one, then there must have been thousands of commie cells in this country back in the Fifties.

For forty-four years, Cold War propaganda held sway in this country. It had a large role in allowing politicians and corporations to have their way in domestic and foreign affairs—even if their way had nothing to do with the Russian or Chinese menace. For all practical purposes the menace mainly was an excuse for corporate America's efforts to secure markets and raw materials in other countries and feed at the defense industry trough at home. If the standoff with the Soviet Union hadn't existed, then they would have liked to invent it.

Then suddenly the Red Menace ended in 1989. How could

we justify sticking in our nose around the world and spending high at Boeing and the rest? They scrambled for twelve years trying to get their story straight. When Dick Cheney announced that the War on Terrorism was going to last 50 years, you could just about hear the sigh of relief issued by his brothers on the board of directors at Halliburton. You could imagine the salivation of the chairman at DynCorp. This sector of business was again looking good.

So now we have the War on Terrorism. Domestically, it looks very similar to the Cold War. Remember Herb Philbrick busting those commie cells? Well, now we have to watch out for terrorist cells. There is a difference, of course. During the Cold War, political and military and technical secrets were stolen or sold, but any cells bent on sabotage or other mayhem either existed only in someone's mind, or if they did exist, were harmless. Al-Qaeda cells, on the other hand, brought us 9/11 and threaten more. Whatever they do to us, the most important point is that we know they exist. That affects our outlook and behavior.

That's what the government wants. When we look at these terrorist cells and other Al-Qaeda activities, they want us to see the same dangers we saw when we looked at international communism. Then they get to act and spend as they wish.

The Cold War perception and the terrorism perception are similarly painted. Back in the Cold War days you had to root out and destroy commie cells. Today we have to root out and destroy Al-Qaeda cells. Back then, when we were in grade school, we had air-raid drills where we had to sit in hallways away from windows with our heads tucked between our knees and our hands over our heads to ward off the nuclear bombs that were sure to come our way. Today we are told to use plastic sheeting and duct tape in

our homes to keep out any toxin Al-Qaeda sends our way.

Back then we had an air-raid siren go off every Tuesday at 10:30 a.m. for practice and to keep us always alert. I always wondered why the Russians didn't attack on Tuesday morning. If they did that, everybody in Chicago would go, "Yeah, right!" and wouldn't have time to get into the crouch with our hands over our heads to protect ourselves from the A-bomb. (Everyone who wasn't a baseball fan in Chicago in 1959 knew they were going to die. When the White Sox won the pennant in 1959, Fire Commissioner Quinn set off the air-raid sirens to celebrate, and it wasn't 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday. Those who didn't follow baseball figured they only had twenty minutes before the Russian planes would be overhead to end our lives—except for those who had confidence in their crouch. Fortunately for Chicagoans, we haven't faced another alarm, because neither of our teams has won a pennant in the last forty-five years.)

Back then we had air-raid sirens to keep us on our toes. Now we have an alert status. Sometimes it's yellow. Sometimes it's orange or green or purple and sometimes elevated and sometimes not. What it all means is Homeland Security saying "Trust us."

Back in the early days of the Cold War, especially when McCarthyism was in its heyday, people were encouraged to spy on their neighbors. If they found anything suspicious they could call in one of J. Edgar's men to make the neighbor come clean. Now from Homeland Security comes the suggestion that Neighborhood Crime Watch organizations be on the outlook for terrorists. "Hey, Matt, that kid across the street with the heavy backpack looks a little Arabic to me. Do you think ...?" "Naw, man, that's his schoolbooks." They say kids are having problems with the weight of their schoolbooks nowadays. Except

for poor kids who go to schools that are short of schoolbooks because money has to go to Homeland Security. Anyway, keep a watch out for neighborhood terrorists (A.K.A. gangbangers).

There was censorship in the Cold War as well as now. On "Nightline" one night, Ted Koppel read off the names of our dead soldiers in Iraq. So Sinclair Communications—owners of 62 ABC outlets—refused to show that particular program. Clear Channel radio stations have a list of songs not to be played. Included on that list are "Imagine" by John Lennon and other anti-war songs from the Sixties and Seventies. Back in the beginnings of the Cold War, no controversial movies came out, and popular songs were "safe." Back then, naughty writers were banned in Hollywood, and today the Dixie Chicks are boycotted.

The worry about communist cells probably died in the Sixties when millions took to the streets to demand civil rights and to oppose the war in Vietnam. The paranoids in the Johnson and Nixon governments figured that all the cell members were now in the streets. Millions of commies. They just knew it all along.

The War on Terrorism is in its infant stages, and we have to deal with its effects. There are two important and separate aspects of terrorism as it relates to the American people. The first is that it is real and must be countered. The second is that it is being used by this nation's ruling class for its own purposes: the suppression of civil liberties and dissent; and war-profiteering, including the pursuit of oil. Like the Cold War, if the War on Terrorism hadn't begun in the aftermath of 9/11, they would have liked to invent it. Now that it's here, we won't hear the end of it for a long time. And somewhere, Herb Philbrick has a smile on his face.

BILL SHUNAS IS A VIETNAM VETERAN AND AUTHOR.

Notes from the Boonies

PAUL WISOVATY

By the time you read this, the election will be over. If Bush loses, there won't be much point in kicking him around anymore. It'll still be fun, but pointless. If he wins, well, we have to play the hand we're dealt. Either way, we got 150,000 American troops with their asses on the line in

Afghanistan and Iraq. Whatever rare humor may pop up in my columns will understandably be lost on them.

If Kerry wins (not my prediction at this moment), he will be wise to remember that about half of the American voting public wanted Junior to Stay the Course.

If anything goes wrong in Iraq—imagine that—he may expect to hear from that half. Fortunately, those "underinformed Americans" won't be able to vote for president for another four years. We've had to suck it up since 2000; maybe this time it'll be their turn.

But back to Iraq, which may

not be expected to disappear from Veteran columns anytime soon. I have no professional credentials as a historian, political scientist or sociologist, and readily defer to the more educated members of our organization for analysis.

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My View

JOHN ZUTZ

The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) have recently gotten themselves into a frenzy. They discovered that a small town in British Columbia is proposing to erect a monument to war resisters — particularly those who dodged the draft and deserted to Canada.

Nelson, a small town nestled among the Canadian Rockies, boasts on its webpage that visitors feel they are “coming home.” The proposed monument, which would be the centerpiece of a celebration called Our Way Home, would feature a bronze statue showing Canadians helping U.S. war resisters.

The monument and the celebration would be privately funded. As you might imagine, when the VFW learned of this

proposed tribute the reaction rocked the Richter Scale. They immediately circled the wagons and began firing. They declared the monument was a slap in the face to the 42 million Americans who served in the military over the years, and termed it a “tribute to cowards.”

They urged their members to write to the Nelson city government and the chamber of commerce threatening to cancel vacation trips and boycott the area. They even urged President Bush to pressure the prime minister of Canada to use his influence to stop the project.

The Nelson city government (perhaps feeling the pressure) has passed a resolution denying public money or public space to the endeavor.

The organizers of Our Way Home contend they will not back down. Their 2006 gathering is planned to include a concert and speeches by members of the anti-war movement. The Bush administration denies the president has mentioned this to the Canadian government.

So this is just another red herring. It’s meant to divide people — a fake issue like gay marriage, or flag desecration. Here’s an institution from the United States trying to impose its morality on independent people, in this case from another country.

In early November 1969 I was home on leave, on my way to Vietnam. My Lai was on the top of every news broadcast. The photos were in Life magazine. I had only been in the army for five

months, but I began questioning what we were doing, and whether I had been told the truth in basic training.

I was AWOL for six days in Seattle and Tacoma.

I was wrestling my own mind to determine whether I would go to ‘Nam or to Canada. I discovered that it required more courage to go slip into Canada than to go along and get along with the Army.

I say: go, Nelson. Don’t let the bullies shut you down; you didn’t during the war. If I had made the other decision, I might have passed through, and we may need you again in the future.



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

Notes From the Boonies

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However, absent another four years of John Ashcroft, I am still allowed to read. Of course, I’d be well advised to borrow books rather than check them out at the library, but that’s another issue.

If you walk up to the average guy on the street in Tuscola (or Chicago) and ask him how long Iraq has been a country, he will probably say, “I dunno, four or five thousand years.” Close. 1922. Iraq was created by the victorious Allied powers at the Paris Peace Conference at the close of World War I. The last British troops pulled out ten years later, and the newly-created sovereign entity of Iraq entered upon the world scene. Gertrude Bell, a journalist covering the Conference, noted that “it was an amazing thing to see all Iraq, from north to south, gathered together. It is the first time it has happened in history.”

What happened, according to my very amateur analysis of history, was that all those rich, white Christian guys who kicked the kaiser’s ass did exactly what they’d been doing in Africa for the past few decades. They carved up Mesopotamia the same way they carved up the Dark Continent — according to whatever formula met their collective military, economic and political needs. They couldn’t have given a rat’s ass less who lived there or what may have been those indigenous populations’ preferences. It was a lot like ‘Nam. “Trust us: we went

to Oxford and Harvard and the Sorbonne; we know what’s best for our dark-skinned brothers who deny Christ.”

But enough about other people. In April of 2003, a local attorney penned a guest editorial in the *Tuscola Review*, lauding Bush for his brilliant plans for handling our post-9/11 world. I called the editor the next day, and said, “Randy, I want either my fifty cents back, or a rebuttal column.” I got the latter, which of course was what I was looking for.

If I may quote from my year-and-a-half-old editorial (which was **not** preaching to the choir): “You all remember 1095. That was the year Europe launched the First Crusade, which was the first time Western civilization decided to colonize and civilize the Islamic world. Even the amateur history student will recall how well that one worked out. (It didn’t.) Nine hundred years later, this administration’s stated goal is to establish representative democratic institutions in Iraq. As much as I’d love to see the House of Burgesses resurrected in Baghdad, I have to tell you that democratic institutions are not a flowering shrub you can pick up at Wal-Mart and transplant into your front yard. They take time, a whole lot of time, to develop. We’ve been working on ours since 1607, and I have yet to talk to anyone, Republican or Democrat, who thinks we’ve perfected them. When we

pull out of Iraq — and I’m only assuming that’s the plan — I do not see long-range Jeffersonian democracy as our legacy to that part of the world. If that is your prediction, I would respectfully suggest that you’ve spent too much time flicking channels between Cartoonworld and presidential press conferences.”

Aren’t I the cynical bastard? Like all of us, I would love to see our Iraq adventure end well, especially to the betterment of those poor beleaguered souls who reside within that entity which Woodrow Wilson, Lloyd George and M. Clemenceau decreed a “nation.” I’d love to see a national legislative body convene in Baghdad, in which some senator stands up and says, “I respectfully disagree with my learned colleague from Mosul, and I yield my floor position so that he may better inform me of his position.” This stuff happens here, phony as it sounds and usually is. I just don’t see it happening anytime soon in Mesopotamia. (Excuse me: Iraq.)

So what’s my point? (Lisa and Jeff tell me that this is a Frequently Asked Question among my readers.) Who died and made me Carnack the Magnificent?

When I talk to my history students about Vietnam, I suggest that if you’ve been doing something really stupid, especially something that gets lots of people killed to no good end, you have two choices. You can keep doing it, or you can stop doing it. This time around, neither Bush nor Kerry, and probably not even Nader,

advocates that dreaded “cut-and-run” approach. That would suggest the unsuggestable: America made a mistake.

I’ve been wrestling with this dilemma for several weeks, which means I’ve been trying to figure out how to end this column. I’m also approaching the deadline for submission of an article to the editors, and if I miss it they’ll replace me with a couple of Frank and Ernest cartoons. (I know; you don’t need to say it.) Lacking an answer, let me retreat and throw out some questions. Does anyone really believe that our indefinite presence in Iraq will stop rather than prolong the bloodletting?

Does anyone think that our 130,000 pieces of cannon fodder have Iraq under control? That they’ll ever get it under control? That Iraq is right around the corner from becoming a representative democracy? And finally, that the future of that oddly-fashioned entity will be any different, whether we pull out tomorrow or five years from now?

Hell, I don’t know, and I certainly don’t have the answer to that last question. So let me refer you to a higher authority: “The moral of this story, the moral of this song, is that one should never be where one does not belong.” (Robert Zimmerman, “John Wesley Harding” album, 1968.)

A simple but timeless truth.



PAUL WISOVATY IS A MEMBER OF VVAW. HE WAS IN VIETNAM WITH THE US ARMY 9TH DIVISION IN 1968.

VVAW Letter of Support

In recent months, VVAW and its credibility have come under attack from the loony Right and the mainstream press. As with the Nixon administration, these new voices are attacking us on whether or not we are really vets and whether we spoke the truth about the war and our participation in it. For over 35 years, Vietnam Veterans Against the War has put itself on the line for veterans and active duty GIs. Now we are putting ourselves on the line for Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

Since its formation Vietnam Veterans Against the War has opposed unjust wars and supported the welfare of men and women on active duty. Whenever there has been a choice between the welfare of GIs and the interests of politicians, VVAW has always supported the welfare of fighting men and women.

The testimony of VVAW members in 1971 during the Winter Soldier Investigation first brought to public attention the conditions of service in Vietnam. Members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War worked tirelessly to establish the credentials and accuracy of each witness before the investigation. A confidential Nixon administration team led by Charles Colson worked ruthlessly to undermine the testimony of each witness afterward. To this day none of the Winter Soldier Investigation evidence has been shown to have been false.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War has continued to focus attention on the many unmet needs of veterans. Members of VVAW developed the rap groups that served as the model for counseling at veterans' outreach centers. Vietnam Veterans Against the War was the first organization to draw attention to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the shameful neglect of patients in VA hospitals, the harmful effect of exposure to Agent Orange, and the inadequacies of educational and employment benefits. VVAW fought for amnesty for war resisters, including vets with bad discharges. VVAW has supported Gulf War veterans in their struggles with Gulf War Syndrome and depleted uranium (DU) ammunition.

The current negative attacks against VVAW are an attack on the whole anti-war movement and must be countered.

Nancy Lessin and Charley Richardson
(cofounders, Military Families Speak Out)
Fran Johns (Military Families Speak Out)
Ron Kovic (Vietnam veteran, "Born on the 4th of July")
W.D. Ehrhart, Ph.D. (poet, writer, teacher)
John Ketwig (Vietnam veteran, "And a Hard Rain Fell")
G. David Curry, Ph.D. ("Sunshine Patriots")
Annie Bailey (former regional coordinator, VVAW)
John Lindquist (former national coordinator, VVAW)
Ed Damato (former national coordinator, VVAW)
Dave "Buzz" Doyle (Gulf War I veteran)
Joe Bangert (WSI testifier, DC-III and more)
Orlando Tizon, Ph.D. (Torture Abolition and Survivors
Support Coalition International [TASSC]*)
Sister Alice Zachmann (SSND, TASSC*),
Harold Nelson, Ph.D. (TASSC*, World War II veteran)
Yoomi Jeong (Korea Truth Commission*)
Jeff Stack (coordinator,
Mid-Missouri Fellowship of Reconciliation*)
Carl Davidson, (Chicagoans Against War & Injustice,*
former national secretary of SDS)

Chukia Lawton (nurse, activist)
Richard Stacewicz, Ph.D.
("Winter Soldiers: Oral History of VVAW")
Jane Fonda (actor, activist)
Robert Crowley (Vietnam vet — Army)
Rev. Daniel Berrigan (teacher, prisoner of conscience, author)
Joel P. Scotti (Vietnam vet — Army)
Don Becketl (Vietnam vet — Army)
Daniel Bowser (Coast Guard veteran)
Anthony Shafton (Chicagoans Against War in Iraq,
Vietnam vet — Merchant Marine)
Tom Hayden (activist)
Paul Appell (Vietnam vet — Army)
Gordon Kobayashi (Vietnam-era vet — Army)
Ramon Rodriguez (veteran, retired NYC firefighter)
Dagny A. Rodriguez (retired school librarian)
Billy Turtle Warrior Ledger (Vietnam vet — Navy)

*for identification only



Leave No Vet Behind

RAY PARRISH

This is addressed to the GIs who, just before falling asleep, ask themselves:

"Should I get up in the morning and strap on weapons once again? Go out to watch my comrades and nameless targets die? Or should I refuse and scream 'I've done enough! I've seen enough!' If I speak up, am I endangering my friends or helping? Do this war's objectives justify what is done every day? Do the ends justify the means? Even if I can live with the memories of what I saw, can I live with what I did? Am I the only one who feels this way? If I tell what happened, am I betraying my friends and condemning myself? Will anyone believe me? Am I a coward for not wanting to do this anymore? Isn't it someone else's turn? Maybe the only way out is to stand up during a firefight. Can I tell anyone what I'm thinking? Who will understand? What did I get myself into?"

I think that it's a bad idea to give advice in an article, because I won't be the one who has to live with the consequences of the decisions that are made based upon this blind advice. My conscience, however, forces me to break that rule. I'll start by saying that you've got to follow your own conscience, because you've got to be able to look at yourself in the mirror every morning for the rest of your life. You've also got to forgive yourself for whatever you had to do in order to survive. And you've got to go to sleep every night knowing that you'll get up in the morning and work to make the world a little better. So you have to balance the duty to protect your friends, yourself and your honor and your duty to come home in one piece and show your comrades how it can be done.

What can I say to GIs who want to serve honorably but who are afraid that they are fighting an immoral war? What would you say? Many GIs find themselves in a situation where they think that their only choices are Death or Dishonor. However, reality's not that simple. No matter what you choose, there are no guarantees that things will turn out the way that you expected. You can, however, improve the odds of being right, and have a backup plan in mind. Find out how other vets handled problems by talking to them and reading their stories

on the 'Net or in *The Veteran*. There's a narrow path through the minefield of military regulations to that honorable discharge that you've already earned, so watch your step or they'll take it away from you. Remember that the path is different for everybody because rules change and not all

this information, so read on.

There's a fine line separating poor performance from malingering, but a big difference in the "character" and benefits of the two military discharges. You can get an honorable discharge for poor performance if your command thinks that you've repeatedly failed to do

VVAW Military Project
(773) 561-VVAW
camiblue@vvaw.org

commanders are alike. So even the best-prepared GI should be ready for surprises.

What if the job itself involves activities that you find not merely distasteful but morally objectionable, such as combat or combat support? Some GIs just refuse to fight. Others do the job until refusal no longer endangers their friends. Everyone will forgive you for doing what you had to do in order to survive. For some GIs, one idea is to make yourself indispensable in the eyes of your supervisors, so they will try to protect you if your efforts to help other GIs or your anti-war activities cause problems. Take any opportunity to volunteer for work that doesn't challenge your conscience. You can show that you know the difference between immoral and dirty or even dangerous work.

Let's review some military discharges.

To begin with, a "conscientious objector" honorable discharge or a "CO" noncombatant reassignment can be had if you prove to the military that you have sincere religious, moral or ethical objections to participating in any war. If it's only this war that you object to, the CO law doesn't help. So if your attitude towards war has been changed by your military experiences, try to put your thoughts in writing, read the regulations and call for help. Most recent CO applicants are denied and they are forced into going UA/AWOL, disobeying orders or other misconduct and end up with a less than honorable discharge. If you're not a CO and you refuse to be pushed into a bad discharge, you are the one who most needs

your military job, despite your best efforts, maybe due to a medical problem. If they think that your failures are on purpose, they can file UCMJ charges against you and give you a less than honorable discharge, which takes away your benefits. So practice looking innocent rather than rebellious.

Honorable discharges are given to GIs who are no longer able to perform military duties due to physical or mental health problems. If the problem is severe and disabling, you should be given a medical retirement, unless the condition may improve, then you can be put on the Temporary Disability Retired List (TDRL). You can also get an Honorable for Other Designated Physical or Mental Conditions (ODPMC) discharge, which are different in each service and include: personality and adjustment disorders, sleepwalking, bedwetting, claustrophobia, dyslexia, overweight, too tall, stuttering, and severe airsickness, seasickness, allergies or nightmares.

An honorable discharge for hardship and dependency may be granted if you document the fact that separation is the only remedy to deal with an immediate family member's financial, emotional or physical need that is severe and not temporary, which has arisen or been aggravated since enlistment in military service, and you've tried everything else. Usually, command will work with GIs to resolve such problems before a separation is given. So a humanitarian reassignment or a transfer to the reserves might be tried. A complete separation is appropriate if those have already been tried, the problem is permanent and separa-

tion is the only way to alleviate or eliminate it.

The issues surrounding UCMJ charges, court-martial and homosexuality are too complex for this article. Call the GI Rights Hotline (800-FYI-95GI) or me for more specific information.

Military and civilian leaders regularly encourage all military personnel to take pride in everyone's accomplishments and to feel that they have contributed to any and all military victories. Instead of being comforted by this, the reluctant warrior faces a guilt-driven "crisis of conscience." Although he may only be loading bombs on an aircraft, he feels partly to blame for the deaths caused by those bombs. Maybe he's just a cook, but when comrades come back with blood on their hands, he feels responsible. For those who have to actually pull the triggers, this crisis can be an emergency that can only be handled by front-line chaplains and doctors.

Stress causes many GIs to suffer from extreme depression, anxiety or other medical problems that require treatment. Since GIs are expected to endure, we often don't seek help when we need it. Our families end up suffering for this. So we have to look out for each other and get "at-risk" buddies to the doctor or chaplain. We also have to do our objecting when we can do it safely. And we have to remember that complaining is always the GI's right, as long as we're careful to follow the UCMJ.



RAY PARRISH (SGT., USAF, 72-75) IS VVAW'S MILITARY COUNSELOR, PROVIDING FREE CONFIDENTIAL DISCHARGE COUNSELING; LEGAL, MEDICAL, AND MENTAL HEALTH REFERRALS FOR GIs AND VETERANS; VA CLAIM AND DISCHARGE UPGRADE HELP; AND COUNTER-RECRUITING AND DRAFT INFORMATION. IF YOU NEED HELP, CALL HIM AT 773-561-VVAW OR EMAIL HIM AT CAMIBLUE@VVAW.ORG.

To donate money for VVAW's Military Project, send checks to:
 VVAW
 PO Box 408594
 Chicago, IL 60640
 and put "Military Project" in the check memo.

Memorial Day in Milwaukee

JOHN ZUTZ

A warm, damp Memorial Day began early for the members and friends of the Milwaukee Chapter. Many of us volunteered to escort hospitalized veterans from the Zablocki VAMC to the ceremonies at Wood National Cemetery. Milwaukee is the only place in the nation that combines a hospital, regional office and cemetery on one campus.

As part of the official ceremony, longtime chapter members Fred Wallace and Muriel Hogan placed a wreath memorializing those who didn't return from war and chapter members who have passed on.

After returning our escorted patients to their rooms, we joined many of those who had attended the ceremony for coffee and rolls

in the hospital auditorium.

We then moved our A-O to Veterans Park, on the Milwaukee lakefront, where the annual Memorial Day Parade would end. We joined with Veterans for Peace, and with volunteer help we set up 800 flags, with a name for a boy or girl who died in Iraq on each one. The idea was to show people what 800 looks like. We also informed visitors that if we observed a minute of silence for each of them we would be standing quietly for over thirteen hours.

As another veterans' group released 10,000 POW/MIA balloons nearby, we performed our 21-flower salute. We do this by ringing a bell (from an old Milwaukee fire engine) and throwing a flower into the field of flags at

the same time. Many present were impressed by the symbolism.

Shortly after the salute the heavens literally opened, and rain flooded the field.



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



VVAW members and friends put names on each of the 800 flags placed in Veterans Park



John Lindquist and Bob Riggle assist a hospitalized veteran onto the bus for transportation to the Wood National Cemetery



Muriel Hogan and Fred Wallace are escorted past an honor guard to place the VVAW wreath at Wood National Cemetery's Memorial Day Ceremony

Captain

MARC LEVY

The Captain lives in North Dakota. The Captain says call collect. Captain recalls LZ Ranch overrun, killing dinks in the wire, Wilson shotgunning one close range, blowing her face away. He recalls Skinny Bob and Ken, the runaway dink when Derrig got hit, Lt. Noble dead in Phuc Vinh, rockets on Quan Loi, Arc Light off Compton.

Captain says he loved combat. Lived for it. Captain commanded three line companies. Spent fourteen months in the bush. Twenty years in service.

Captain says, "Wasn't Miller in your platoon?"

I say, "Sir, Miller was a no-good, brown-nosing, two-faced, motherfuckin' coward." I say Timmy Day kicked Miller's chickenshit ass after Captain and Burtoni killed the dinks and Crazy Frank fucked them up. I say Miller was big and tall and smart and humped that twenty-five pound PRC-25 radio, but that day, that fuckin' day, Miller hung back, then ran.

Captain is quiet. Captain says he doesn't remember. Captain says Miller became his RTO in June. Captain says he remembers Keith. Captain says Keith was a no-good E-6 Shake 'n' Bake

ninety-day fuckup. Captain says it was his own fuckin' fault tripping the automatic ambush, blowing himself away.

Captain went back with Special Forces spring '75. Says he burned secret documents, blew the embassy, no choppers, wild civilians, dead Marines, escaped by tank.

Captain says he met his second wife on a pistol range. Damn if she didn't outshoot him, winning the bet. Been buying her dinner ever since. Captain says got to let me go. Fire department meeting.

I say, "Sir, are you the

chief?"

Captain, in that sweet North Dakota, career service, post-Vietnam, post-Panama, post-Grenada, post-Desert Storm, pre-Iraq, understated command voice, Captain says, "Shit. That son-of-a-bitch works for me."



MARC LEVY SERVED WITH D I/7 CAV IN VIETNAM/CAMBODIA '70 AS AN INFANTRY MEDIC. HIS SHORT STORY "HOW STEVIE NEARLY LOST THE WAR" WAS PUBLISHED IN NEW MILLENNIUM WRITINGS, ISSUE 14 (2004-2005).

Chicago Homeless Standdown

MEG MINER

It was a little surreal working the standdown this Memorial Day. In one half of the armory, older vets in a mixture of military and civilian clothes milled about or sat on cots as the sun came up. In the other half, across a waist-high barrier, an oval of Humvees ready for deployment stood inside the ring and young GIs in uniform passed in and out of rooms on the sides of the martialling bay.

I wonder what the two groups thought of each other. I'm sorry to say I didn't ask. I know other VVAW members talked to the new troops, and I hope to hear their thoughts on the scene.

I kept thinking about the politicians who were surely out distributing wreaths at the feet of impassive stone monuments for the benefit of photographers that day. I can't help but wonder what a different country we would be living in if the people who casually involve us in wars would spend a day now and then serving food to new and old troops, side by side.

Could our politicians even look these troops in the eye?



Maybe. But I doubt we'll get a chance to know. They've got different priorities for their precious time: funding new cemeteries (like the newly-approved \$8.7 million one in Oakland County, Michigan) or missile defense systems or nuclear weapons programs, to name a few. Funny how they can squeeze out money for all that and still claim there's nothing left for VA hospitals and services.

Everyone talks about peace

but no one does anything constructive about it. We hear from every president that we are a peace-loving people, but we go right on sponsoring death and destruction and skimping on life-sustaining, constructive policies.

Peace lovers? Our war is supposed to secure peace, our occupation is billed as liberation, our justice is conducted in concentration camps, behind closed doors. Nope, I'm not buying the

peace-loving angle anymore.

I think I'm going to start asking my elected representatives to go to standdown. Maybe we'll get a chance to talk to a few vets together and adjust our priorities.



MEG MINER IS A LIBRARIAN IN CENTRAL ILLINOIS AND A MEMBER OF VVAW.

Homeless Sandwich Run

BOB RIGGLE

Somewhere near Chicago is a storage facility where a crack group of dedicated and very practiced individuals headed by Jim and Virginia Proffitt takes care of business. It's Sunday, 12:00 p.m., and this is the place where it all begins. A fast-paced regimen, with flying mayo and shredded lettuce, 51 Sundays every year for almost 15 years now. I'm referring to the Homeless Sandwich Run in Chicago.

In about one to two hours over a thousand sandwiches are thrown together, wrapped and bagged. Along with treats and soda, they are later distributed to some of downtown Chicago's homeless. It's estimated that at least 35 to 40 percent of these are veterans. Jim Proffitt, who along with his wife Virginia began this program 15 years ago in their kitchen, figures they serve about 750 people per week. To think it all began with 30 sandwiches, a small pot of coffee, and an idea of giving back to some of those on the streets of Chicago.

This well-oiled operation involves members of the local

VietNow chapter in Villa Park, Illinois, students from Driscoll Catholic High School, and people from DuPage County Probation with community service hours to perform. Anyone fortunate to

51,450 sandwiches served in 2002 and 56,100 in 2003, you can see it doesn't go too far. Along with the lunches, clothing, blankets and hygiene products are also distributed. Kind of like a rolling

In about one to two hours over a thousand sandwiches are thrown together, wrapped and bagged. . . . They are later distributed to some of downtown Chicago's homeless.

have helped at the Chicago standdowns is familiar with the great job VietNow always does preparing the meals. Some have even had firsthand experience helping with a scaled-down version of the Sandwich Run.

As with all charitable undertakings, it's not cheap, nor are the things you'd like always available. VietNow's national office provides a grant of \$800 per month, but materials for the lunches cost about \$300 every two weeks. With

standdown without the medical and career services.

Okay, we've got the van loaded and it's time to hit the streets of downtown Chicago. With our mission of "Veterans Helping Americans," we hit west of the Loop, lower Wacker, and Maxwell Street. At designated stops on our route there are as few as ten or as many as eighty homeless persons. We stop at a past-prime men's hotel, a few under-the-bridge hangouts, and

even outside the VA building. If things go well timewise, we arrive at Pacific Garden Mission at about 5:30 to serve a hot meal to the residents that the mission has prepared. We even get a meal if there is food and time left. While the day is over for me, not so for Proffitt and his merry band (yes, they do all enjoy it). The last part of the run takes until about 10:00 p.m. That's ten hours, minimum, fifty-one times every year. Simply amazing!

Okay, here's the part you knew was gonna come. Volunteers are always welcome, especially during the summer. Donations of foodstuffs, clothing, blankets, shoes and hygiene products are never in enough supply. Oh yeah, and money. Money always works. If you're in a position to donate time or anything of need, please contact Jim or Virginia Proffitt at (630) 462-1541 or (630) 209-7242.



BOB RIGGLE IS AN ARMY VETERAN AND A MILWAUKEE-AREA CONTACT FOR VVAW.

Memorial Day in Chicago

BARRY ROMO

Chicago's VVAW Memorial Day ceremony was one of the biggest and best this year. About 125 people gathered to hear speeches and make a statement with their presence.

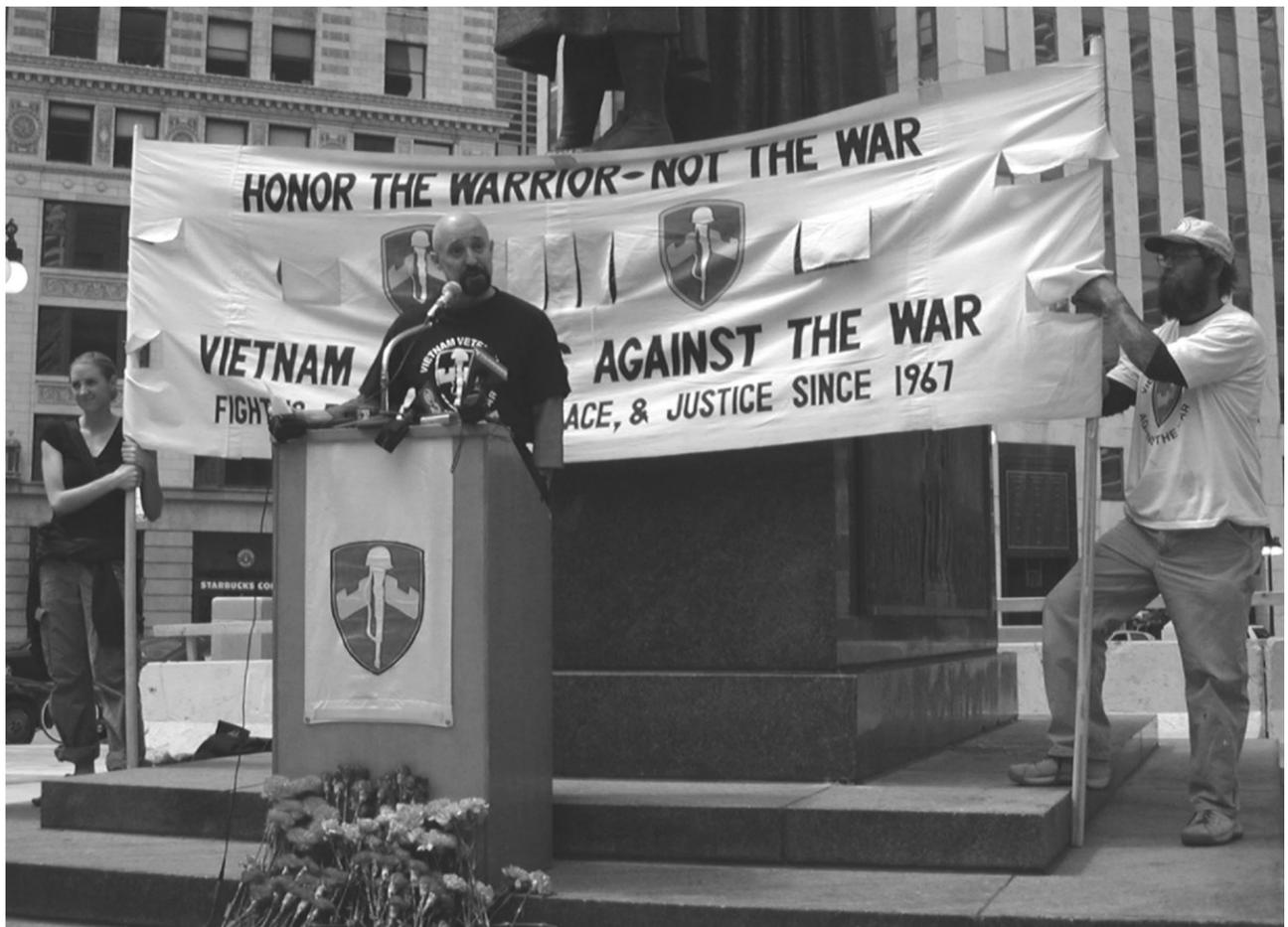
First to speak was Rosemarie Slavenas, whose son was killed in Iraq. Her poem for him brought the listeners to tears.

Next was Rob Sarra, Iraq Marine vet and former sergeant. VVAW met him before he was released from active duty and has worked with him since. His speech was powerful, emotional and to the point. He is currently a Midwest contact for Iraq Veterans Against the War.

Longtime VVAW member Richard Tapia spoke about Vietnam, killing and the role of racism. He connected when he said that you have to dehumanize people before you can kill them.

Meg Miner, a Gulf War-era veteran and Air Force sergeant reminded people of who fights and who pays the price.

National Coordinator Joe Miller paid tribute to longtime VVAW friend Dave Dellinger, saying it was in 1966 that Dave



Brooke Anderson, Barry Romo and Buzz Doyle at Memorial Day, Chicago

reminded us not to equate the war with the warrior. Dave had built bridges with GIs and vets.

Ray Parrish, VVAW's GI counselor, talked about our military counseling program. (Read Ray's new column, "Leave No

Vet Behind," elsewhere in this issue.)

We ended with placing flowers in the fountain to remember the dead on both sides of war. Just then a monsoon occurred, and I told everyone to run away.

We met after near our office for barbecue and drinks and discussion and friendship.



BARRY ROMO IS A VVAW NATIONAL COORDINATOR.

In Memoriam

The weight of grief is heavy on my shoulders.
I need no special day to bring memories to mind
of all you said and did.
Your face, smiling or grave, is with me always,
child of my heart's desire.
I see you small and wondering, "Mom,
What makes the sun go down?" Then
thoughtfully, "I know, the wind blows it away."
So alive, biking, soccer, swimming, skiing,
running, rollerblading, pumping iron.
You became so very strong, but always
you were gentle and kind.
Your hands, light on the piano keys,
brought out the sounds of harmony,
like wind rustling softly in the leaves,
or rain, clear and sparkling on the grass.
Careful listening was your way.
Such a bright future you had planned,
and you labored long and patiently to
realize your dream.

Then rolled the drums of war,
and you were called.
Your still small voice said, "No!"
But the rolling drums rolled on, and
you were gone.
Into hatred loosed from the gates of hell,
your winged bird was sent,
shot down, and fell.
Your bright future lay bloodied in the sand
to rise no more.
And each day as I grow old, I miss you so.
A grave is such a solitary place
for a little boy who loved to play.

Rosemarie Dietz Slavenas
For Brian



Presenting the Flag

HANNAH FRISCH

On September 19, VVAW supported a remarkable anti-war rally in the heart of wealthy Republican territory in the Chicago suburbs. The event in Barrington, Illinois honored those who had fallen in the Iraq war and called for bringing the troops home and ending the war. Representatives from local churches and a mosque spoke at the opening ceremony. Cards bearing the names of fallen soldiers and long-stemmed lilies were handed out to about 1,000 participants. Local churches tolled bells for each of the 1,023 deaths of U.S. combat troops as demonstrators marched in solemn procession behind a horse-drawn wagon carrying a flag-draped coffin to a local memorial park for fallen firefighters and police. There, members of VVAW and a representative of Veterans for Peace served as pallbearers, carrying the coffin up to the base of the speakers' platform. Rob Sarra, a founding member of Iraq Veterans Against the War and a close supporter of VVAW, gave a moving speech opposing the war in Iraq. Two members of military families spoke next. Then the flag on the coffin was folded while a poem was read by Pat Vogel. In the tradition of presenting the flag to the relatives of the deceased, organizer Paul Vogel told the crowd, "You are the brothers and sisters of the soldiers who have died in Iraq, so I am presenting the flag to all of you." People then lined up to place the lilies on the coffin.

The march and rally had its origin in a display of flags representing dead soldiers that Paul Vogel placed in the front yard of his temporary staffing business. Local people would stop in to tell Vogel that they agreed with opposing the war but honoring the soldiers, and the Vogel family got the idea to organize an event. Paul's son Aaron had just returned from Iraq after serving there with his Army Reserve unit, the 652nd Engineering Company from Ellsworth, Wisconsin. The unit was assigned not to engineering but to MP duty, and four of Aaron's comrades were killed in Iraq. Aaron worked on the website for the event, and his mother and grandmother helped with publicity. Aaron was shown in a *Chicago Tribune* photo sitting in the yard in front of his father's business surrounded by the flags



VVAW members carrying the coffin

representing the soldiers. At the rally, he joined Iraq Veterans Against the War.

VVAW co-sponsored the event and helped promote it. According to Paul Vogel, VVAW's participation made it easier for other veterans to come out and support the march. Iraq Veterans Against the War, American Friends Service Committee and

Military Families Speak Out also co-sponsored. The event was widely publicized on Chicago-area television and public radio stations and was covered in the *Tribune* and in local suburban papers.

Paul Vogel also reports that the event will be sending a \$500 check to Army Emergency Relief, an organization that helps the

families of Army Reservists and National Guard.



HANNAH FRISCH IS A VVAW NATIONAL STAFF MEMBER AND CHICAGO RESIDENT.



Service at beginning in yard with 1032 flags



Dave Kettenhofen with the name of one of the dead soldiers

Defending VVAW Against Swift Boat Vets' Lies

KEITH NOLAN

There exists a website whose sole purpose is to bash VVAW. I took offense at the tactics used at wintersoldier.com and attempted to post a message at the website's message board. The administrator refused to post my message.

NOLAN TO WINTERSOLDIER: Please consider this letter a protest against the one-sided arguments and underhanded tactics deployed at this website in order to bash John Kerry and the Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

It is one thing to disagree with the political philosophy of the VVAW, or to argue that the organization drew false conclusions about genocide-as-policy based on the isolated war crimes its members saw in Vietnam.

It is another thing entirely, however, to defame those combat veterans who joined the VVAW as misfits, frauds, liars, traitors, and dupes of the KGB. What rubbish. You would never know from this website that General David Shoup, USMC (Ret.), who earned the Medal of Honor in World War II, publicly supported John Kerry and the VVAW in 1971.

Every veterans' organization attracts a certain fringe element, and I don't doubt, as is charged here, that a charlatan like Mark Lane included false testimony in his book about Vietnam. It is also charged here, however, that numerous phonies gave false testimony at the VVAW's Winter Soldier Investigation in Detroit, and that only about thirty percent

of the men who participated in Operation Dewey Canyon III were genuine veterans of the Vietnam War. This I very much doubt, and I have searched this website in vain for even a shred of proof to back up these very serious charges.

All this website really has to offer are the personal opinions of historians Burkett and Lewy, who seem to have had no personal contact with VVAW members and are instead relying on information from the Nixon White House. For obvious political reasons, the Nixon administration did its best in 1971 to discredit Kerry and the VVAW. They came up with one VVAW leader (Al Hubbard) who had lied about his rank and exaggerated his military service. And that was it. They did not identify any other phony veterans, nor did they identify by name a single fraud who provided testimony in Detroit.

Who were all the liars and frauds in the VVAW? No one seems to know. And what exactly were they lying about in Detroit? One or two possibly-exaggerated stories aside, the great majority of those who testified in Detroit described the exact same kind of abuses and atrocities that show up in the court-martial record of the war, in memoirs written by Vietnam veterans, and in histories written by academics. I don't understand how this website can so blithely dismiss the Detroit testimony when the stories told in Detroit mirror the documented war crimes committed at places

like My Lai, My Khe, and Son Thang, and the documented illegal behavior of units like Task Force Barker and the Tiger Force of the 1-327th Airborne Infantry.

I've personally heard the same kind of stories about burned villages, mistreated civilians, and summarily-executed prisoners dozens of times over from Vietnam veterans who have no political sympathy for the left-wing politics of the VVAW. Wars produce atrocities. Frustrating guerrilla wars produce a particularly horrific number of atrocities. That some individual soldiers and certain units responded with excessive brutality in Vietnam shouldn't really surprise anyone. I know many good men who stayed true to their moral compass in Vietnam and served with distinction and honor. I also know many good men who have spent their lives regretting the things they did under the pressure of combat back when they were nineteen- and twenty-year-old grunts in Vietnam.

And why the desire at this website to whitewash the counterproductive brutality of General Westmoreland's search-and-destroy strategy? As has been noted by many disgusted infantry officers, Westmoreland's search-and-destroy strategy resulted in thousands of destroyed villages, tens of thousands of civilian casualties, hundreds of thousands of refugees, and drove the rural population of Vietnam into the arms of the Viet Cong. Kerry was only speaking the truth when he said that "We

rationalized destroying villages in order to save them."

Good men are allowed to disagree on something as tragic as the Vietnam War without one side condemning those on the other side of the political line as being liars and frauds. Too bad that VVAW members like Barry Romo, James Duffy, Mark Lenix, Nathan Hale, Charles Stephens, Gary Keyes, Michael Hunter, Mike McCusker, Scott Moore, Donald Duncan, Steve Pitkin, and Kenneth Ruth aren't here to defend themselves against the charge that they never served in combat and invented their stories about Vietnam.

Keith Nolan (author of *RIPCORD*, *OPERATION BUFFALO*, *SAPPERS IN THE WIRE*, etc.)

Here's the response I got from the website administrator:

WINTERSOLDIER TO NOLAN: Sorry, but we feel no obligation to provide space for those who wish to denigrate and marginalize what we're trying to accomplish. Consider writing your own website. Admin

KEITH W. NOLAN HAS BEEN INTERVIEWING VIETNAM VETERANS AND WRITING ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES SINCE 1978. HE IS AUTHOR OF TEN BOOKS ON THE WAR, INCLUDING "RIPCORD," "OPERATION BUFFALO," "SAPPERS IN THE WIRE," AND "THE MAGNIFICENT BASTARDS." HE LIVES NEAR ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI. HE CAN BE REACHED AT: KWNOLAN@AOL.COM

Chicanos in the Ranks

BARRY ROMO (REVIEWER)

**Soldados:
Chicanos in Viet Nam**
By Charley Trujillo
(Chusma House Publications,
1990)

**Soldados:
Chicanos in Viet Nam
The Documentary**
By Charley Trujillo and
Sonya Rhee
(Chusma House Publications,
1993)

with narratives of the Vietnam War. (Chicanos are sometimes called Mexican Americans.)

There are few books about Chicanos in the military, but even if there were thousands, this one would stand out. Trujillo relates the lives and experiences of Chicanos from the cotton fields of Corcoran, California to the rice paddies of Vietnam and back home.

This year I discovered a

DVD had been made; based on the book, it's a terrific documentary featuring interviews and vintage footage. At 28 minutes in length, it's perfect for the classroom. This is much more than just Chicano or ethnic studies, just as "Glory" was more than just about black troops. I highly recommend it.

The book and DVD — and a whole lot more — are available from:

Chusma House Publications
P.O. Box 467
San Jose, CA 95103
(408) 947-0958
www.chusmahouse.com



*BARRY ROMO IS A NATIONAL
COORDINATOR OF VVAW.*

I really don't do reviews, except sometimes to talk about other things beyond the film or book. Not this time. I was lucky enough to get a copy of the book, "Soldados: Chicanos in Viet Nam," filled



Winter Whether

JOHN PRADOS

To suggest that John Kerry lied in describing American atrocities when he returned home from Vietnam, a number of conservative commentators have noted that he relied on the testimony of the Winter Soldier Investigation, a meeting of antiwar vets that took place in 1971. Last week, *National Review* editor Rich Lowry described the investigation as a “since-discredited project that gathered first-person accounts of alleged atrocities from American vets.” Earlier this month, Eric Fetterman wrote in *The New York Post* that the investigation was hatched by a “conspiracy crackpot” and later exposed as a “mass of fabrications.” And a host of conservative websites piled on, explaining to readers that the winter soldiers had long since been exposed as frauds.

The problem with this line of analysis is that the Winter Soldier Investigation was never discredited. A handful of individual stories may have been called into question, but the main thrust of the soldiers’ testimonies — that American atrocities were widespread in Vietnam — is today beyond dispute. Indeed the emergence of new evidence during the last 30 years has only solidified the winter soldiers’ overall case.

The Winter Soldier Investigation took place in Detroit in 1971. For three days, beginning on January 31, members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) related their personal experiences of events that constituted war crimes or violations of international law. VVAW had carefully prepared this public testimony, asking speakers only to relate events of which they had direct knowledge. Veterans wrote preliminary accounts of their testimonies on questionnaires; VVAW staff then went through huge numbers of these questionnaires before selecting the individuals who would be asked to present evidence. Every veteran who presented in Detroit had to show a copy of his military papers (the military form known as DD-214) to demonstrate that he had actually been present at the places and times he was speaking about. The papers of VVAW today contain boxes upon boxes of the questionnaires and records of this event. They show not only that the testimonies were prepared meticulously, but that the evidence actu-

ally presented in Detroit in early 1971 represented only a small percentage of the total number of questionable events these soldiers witnessed in Vietnam.

The veterans who appeared at the Winter Soldier Investigation included both officers and enlisted men — more than a hundred in all — with service dates from 1963 through 1970. They represented a wide array of units: the Special Forces (Green Berets); the 1st and 3rd Marine Divisions; the 1st Cavalry Division; the 101st Airborne Division; the 173rd Air-

The main thrust of the soldiers' testimonies — that American atrocities were widespread in Vietnam — is today beyond dispute.

borne Brigade; the 4th, 9th, 25th and Americal Infantry Divisions; and other units as well. Soldiers in Detroit testified to civilians killed in “reconnaissance by fire,” that is, gunfire aimed at a village before troops entered it; brutal interrogations; people’s heads or ears cut off to frighten others; villagers forcibly relocated and their homes destroyed; prisoners mistreated; and numerous other abuses.

Later that year, John Kerry carried these stories to the public in both his congressional testimony and in his public appearances. The allegations were hotly disputed at the time by veterans such as John O’Neill, who has now resurfaced as a leader of the anti-Kerry group Swift Boat Veterans for Truth. O’Neill and Kerry debated each other on “The Dick Cavett Show” on June 30, 1971, with O’Neill demanding that the winter soldiers give “depositions” in order to prove the veracity of their allegations.

But the current claim by conservatives that the Winter Soldier Investigation was discredited can be most directly traced to a 1978 book by Guenther Lewy called “America in Vietnam,” which attempted an early form of the argument that the United States won the Vietnam war. In the main, Lewy merely reprised John O’Neill’s objections from “The Dick Cavett Show.” Lewy’s primary evidence consists of noting that VVAW members refused to

give depositions. When the Naval Investigative Service tried to pull VVAW members into an inquiry, it found one Marine who either could not or would not give details of what he had seen and allegedly located several other veterans who said they had never gone to Detroit. (O’Neill had cited this same information in his televised debate with Kerry.) But even if true, these incidents were far too limited to establish anything in particular about the Winter Soldier Investigation; the fact that some of the winter soldiers declined to

give depositions does not prove or disprove the legitimacy of the entire project. The VVAW leadership left it up to individual members to decide how to respond to requests for depositions. And veterans had good reasons to decline. For one thing, they argued that their purpose was to protest U.S. policy, not to draw attention to individual soldiers. What’s more, with the VVAW under direct assault from the Nixon administration, it’s understandable that the group’s members were loathe to cooperate with government investigators.

The remaining plank in Lewy’s case against the winter soldiers consists merely of noting the participation in Detroit of JFK assassination conspiracy theorist Mark Lane. And even in attempting to cast doubt on the veracity of the winter soldiers’ allegations, Lewy also wrote that “incidents similar to some of those described at the VVAW hearing undoubtedly did occur”; that policies such as the military’s emphasis on “body count” certainly “created an atmosphere conducive to atrocities”; that in 1967 Vietnam field commander General William Westmoreland had to issue orders prohibiting cutting ears or fingers off the bodies of the dead; and that the conduct of a war without fronts “created a setting especially conducive to atrocities.”

Other claims put forward at the Winter Soldier Investigation — such as an allegation that the

Marines made an incursion into Laos (Operation Dewey Canyon) that was illegal under U.S. law — were later shown to be true. And in the years since the winter soldiers convened in Detroit, the general premise of their gathering has been validated: American soldiers did indeed commit atrocities in Vietnam; the most famous, the My Lai massacre of March 1968, was merely the starting point. The names of villages like Son Thang and Thanh Phong, locales of other acknowledged atrocities, are now burned into the memory of historians. The actions of Tiger Force of the 327th Airborne Infantry in the Central Highlands in 1967 are still today under investigation as war crimes. (Indeed veterans of Tiger Force have acknowledged the atrocities and have appeared on television to describe their roles and remorse.) And the Phoenix Program led to thousands of deaths despite efforts by the CIA’s William Colby to impose legal strictures on program activities. As a historian of the Vietnam war, over the decades I have myself heard veterans tell innumerable stories of incidents they saw and would prefer to forget. The truth is that American military tactics and the nature of the war conditioned the ferocity of field operations, while widespread U.S. attitudes of contempt toward the Vietnamese made atrocities all the more difficult to prevent.

The only thing that analysts like Guenther Lewy have shown is that it is difficult to establish precisely how many atrocities took place, or how many Vietnamese, innocent or otherwise, perished as a result of them. Thirty years later polemicists like John O’Neill continue to cloud reality with obfuscation. None of this changes the fact that far from being discredited, the Winter Soldier Investigation has been largely validated. Conservative commentators should stop pretending otherwise.

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JOHN PRADOS IS A SENIOR ANALYST WITH THE NATIONAL SECURITY ARCHIVE IN WASHINGTON, D.C., AND EDITOR, WITH MARGARET PRATT-PORTER, OF THE BOOK “INSIDE THE PENTAGON PAPERS” (UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS PRESS).

Nixon and VVAW

HORACE COLEMAN

Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear: 1967-74.

The time of VVAW's founding by Vietnam combat veterans. Of presidential candidate Richard M. Nixon's "secret plan to end the war" (Vietnamization? Invading Cambodia? Massive bombing?).

Whatever the plan was, it didn't work. America's longest conflict ended in an unsatisfactory "peace with honor," unfulfilled objectives, and smoldering bitterness that blazes away 30 years later.

There were turkey shoots at My Lai and Kent State and Tiger Force excesses. Decades later, an investigative team from the *Toledo Blade* won a Pulitzer Prize for telling that story. And all the while VVAW soldiered on, still anti stupid wars and pro using — and treating — our troops and veterans well.

These were the days, my friend, of the skulking and creeping of members of CREEP (the Committee to Reelect the President) and of FBI investigations into VVAW. Of Dewey Canyon operations I and II — and VVAW's Dewey Canyon III and Winter Soldier Investigation and John Kerry's Senate testimony. Of hundreds of pages of dossiers about

VVAW that produced few arrests or trials and no convictions.

VVAW's very existence frustrated Nixon. VVAW was the real thing, controversial but undeniable people who'd been there, done that, fought and bled. Faced with complicated and unpleasant situations, some lie and deny: "If I didn't do it or see it, it didn't happen." Those who committed or covered up atrocities dishonored and endangered their fellow warriors in a vicious war.

In his memoir "About Face," Colonel David Hackworth wrote several things that should be remembered and reconsidered:

The Cambodian exercise was the straw that broke the camel's back for me about the war in Vietnam and the direction America was heading. Militarily the operation was correct ... But what was wrong with it, besides the fact that it came five years too late (five years in which our army lost the lion's share of its great NCOs and stud officers, and the American people lost their stomach for the conflict), was that the way it was done violated all the principles the United States of America, the country I loved and soldiered for,

was built on. Cambodia was a neutral country. Our incursion, at this time in the war, with no prior notice to the fledgling Lon Nol government or even to our ambassador to Cambodia, was not, to my mind, any different from the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor. In my estimation the exercise was an immoral, ill-thought-out venture, and one that would prove to be both an expensive tactical donnybrook and an irreparable strategic defeat.

The colonel also has a few choice words about My Lai and Nixon:

... My Lai reflected strategic bankruptcy of moral fiber in the Army's senior officer corps, a direct result of rampant careerism. To me, all this was bad enough. But then, when the Army actually had the balls to stand in the door and convict Calley for murder, to have Richard Nixon come along and for purely political ends interfere with military justice and essentially nullify the result was too much for me. The kid was guilty as hell. Having judged him as so, the Army had to start addressing its own inadequacies, to find out how it could have allowed such a

"leader" to get through the system in the first place. But Nixon's action was an out — as good as excusing the Army from even beginning that self-examination. Fundamentally, it was the worst thing since My Lai itself.

In a 1971 interview with ABC's Saigon correspondent Howard Tuckner, Hackworth said, "I just have seen the American nation spend so much of its wonderful, great young men in this country. I have seen our national wealth being drained away. I see the nation being split apart and almost being split asunder because of this war, and I am wondering to what end it is all to lead to."

VVAW saw Nixon's and the war's flaws before the colonel did. Nixon left office in disgrace caused by his own acts. We're still here.



HORACE COLEMAN IS THE VVAW CONTACT FOR LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA.

Cross-Cultural Music

BOB RIGGLE (REVIEWER)

New X: Fresh X

New X Art Ensemble

(XART Audio / Art Works USA, 2003)

New X is an evolving free jazz collective that was formulated to expand and contract easily in its musical pursuits. The New X genre, while shunning stereotypes, has a genuine respect for the past. At the same time there is a definite focus on a cross-cultural mix of melody, rhythm, and continents.

When I was first asked if I was interested in doing this review, I was glad to; I've known Billy Curmano for over 30 years. But after starting on the project I realized it might be hard to separate the various artistic skills he has from what I was supposed to be reviewing.

A little background on Billy X. Curmano, longtime VVAW member, artist, poet, musician,

and fantastic guerilla theater creator/performer. He is, if the need arises, flamboyant and outrageous at the same time. And he will wear some prop-up-your-eyelids costumes to make a point. On to the review.

"New X : Fresh X" screams eclectic. I know not one damn thing about this form of music, but it is good! With Steve Smith on dijeridu and tenor sax on "Minnesota Single Search" and at times on "New York Conversation" and "Street People," there seems to be a very strong Sun Ra influence and maybe a little John Coltrane. At the same time, "New York Conversation" and "Street People" bring to mind the Sixties talkin' blues.

"Say Son," my personal favorite, also strikes me as Curmano's most poetic work. "Wagin' War" is Curmano's typical take on the military structure and its politics.

My take on "New X : Fresh X"? Please check it out. When



was the last time you could invite your friends over to check out the awesome mbira or dijeridu player on Billy X's latest CD?

BOB RIGGLE IS THE VVAW MILWAUKEE CHAPTER COORDINATOR AND A MILWAUKEE CONTACT.

Real Results of War

STANLEY CAMPBELL (REVIEWER)

**Purple Hearts:
Back from Iraq**
By Nina Berman
(Trolley Books, 2004)

Want to see the real results of the Iraq war? Look at "Purple Hearts," a book of photographs and interviews of soldiers who lost limbs for our country. Rather, not for our country but for George Bush's plan of getting rid of Saddam Hussein.

The pictures are haunting and mysteriously beautiful. The interviews range from pride in serving one's country to desolation at losing a leg. "Purple Hearts" refers to the medals these men and women received. Yes, there is a woman interviewed: Lt. Jordan Johnson, a 23-year-old from San Antonio, Texas. She was in charge of a platoon protecting

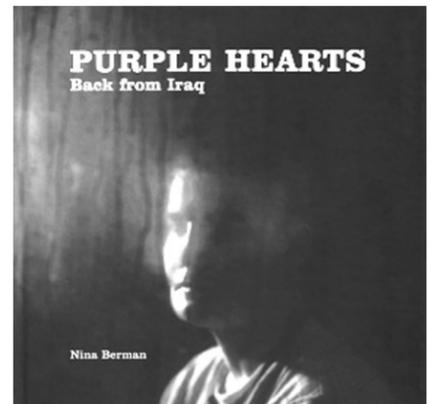
the general of the 1st Armored Division. She was en route from Baghdad International Airport on July 20, 2003 when her Humvee flipped and crashed, smashing her leg and tailbone and sending her into a coma. Another soldier died in the crash. "I'm not a hero; I'm a survivor," she says.

Many of the wounded fought like Spc. Frederick Allen, Jr., a machine gunner with the 82nd Airborne. "I thought going to war was jumping out of planes," he says. He was wounded when a rocket-propelled grenade ripped through his left leg and shattered his right leg during a firefight in Fallujah on October 31, 2003. "The recruiters come to school once a year," he recalls. "They had a list of people. Every year, they just called random people, and once they get one person, then they

ask their friends to come. That's how they get people to sign up. He asked me if I wanted to, and I said sure."

The pictures show the soldiers in their homes surrounded by personal effects or at therapy, exercising and learning to use their prosthetics. The soldiers in this book represent a small number of the 5,394 American servicemen and women wounded in action during the first 15 months of the American invasion and occupation of Iraq. A precise number of combat support or non-hostile injuries is not known. The Pentagon omits from its casualty reports those soldiers medically evacuated from Iraq due to friendly fire, sickness, accidents or psychological trauma. Iraqi casualties are not counted at all.

This book should be placed



on the desk of every American senator and congressman. Every military recruiter should have a copy and should be forced to show it to the young men and women they recruit.



STANLEY CAMPBELL IS A MEMBER OF
VVAW IN ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS.

New Books on PTSD

RAY PARRISH (REVIEWER)

**The PTSD Workbook:
Simple Effective Techniques
for Overcoming Traumatic
Stress Symptoms**
By Mary Beth Williams &
Soili Poijula
(New Harbinger Publications,
2002)

Circumstances force many veterans to deal with their PTSD alone. Some vets, especially Guard and Reserve, don't live near VA clinics. Others won't admit to others that they have a problem. Now, with so many stressed-out vets returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, the current programs are being

overwhelmed by the demand. These vets can help themselves using this workbook

In addition to PTSD, this workbook discusses Acute Stress Disorder (ASD), which describes problems during the first few days or weeks after a trauma, and "complex PTSD," for people who have experienced prolonged, repeated or extensive exposure to traumatic events. Although "complex PTSD" isn't a recognized diagnosis yet, after doing the exercises veterans will see this distinction and appreciate the fact that half of the book addresses the symptoms of complex PTSD. The book is

designed to be used by survivors of all types of trauma, so combat vets may be tempted to skip some of the exercises and chapters related to rape. Don't! Uncle Sam's true nature is revealed!

"The PTSD Workbook" helps vets to address their PTSD symptoms through a series of questions and exercises designed to reveal how the trauma changed us and how we can change ourselves. The exercises in the first half of the book help vets find the courage to begin self-therapy and motivate them to seek outside help if necessary. Some vets will be unable to do the exercises since many of them may be difficult or painful, but just making the effort may help the vet understand how severe their problems are and why therapy may be needed.

**Advances in the Treatment
of Posttraumatic Stress
Disorder: Cognitive-
Behavioral Perspectives**
By Steven Taylor, Ed.
(Springer Publishing
Company, 2004)

I cannot overstate the importance of this not-too-academic book. This book is essential for veterans' advocates lobbying for systemic changes. The book's 14 articles by international experts have extensive footnotes and

pointed recommendations. This provides the necessary credibility to show how extensive and severe PTSD really is and the ineffectiveness of current treatment programs. It also enables the reader to pursue more in-depth research.

The "Military Populations" article, written by Australians who pulled no punches, is invaluable for counter-recruiting as well as for therapy. Various PTSD treatments are compared. There is the first case study using "virtual reality" technology. It enabled a Vietnam veteran to repeatedly relive the combat traumas, re-examine his "blame" and put an end to thirty years of nightmares. VA doctors report their success using the "readiness to change" approach, useful in addiction recovery, to overcome the problem of PTSD "treatment failure." There are valuable insights in the articles on how a veteran's social support, anger, anxiety, pain and other physical and mental disorders influence and are influenced by PTSD. Get your library to order a copy.



RAY PARRISH (SGT., USAF, 72-75)
IS VVAW'S MILITARY COUNSELOR.

READ HIS COLUMN, "LEAVE NO VET
BEHIND," ON PAGE 7.



Al Hubbard speaking at VVAW takeover of VA office in New York City, 1971-72

Vets Join Protests at RNC

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The newly-formed Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) carried banners and marched wearing desert fatigues and Operation Iraqi Freedom medals. Other recently-returned vets joined the contingent, happy to see comrades speaking out for those still in harm's way. More than a few active-duty servicemen, wearing hats and sunglasses to mask their identities, fell in along the route.

The contingent continued to grow to almost 1,000: a veterans' peace battalion on the march. We began to call cadence.

*Hey, hey, Uncle Sam
We remember Vietnam
We don't want this Iraq War
Bring our troops back to our shores*

*If they tell you you should go
There is something you should know
They wave the flag when you attack
When you come home they turn their back*

Soon hundreds of others, especially young people, began joining our ranks, drawn by the power of our cadence and in respect for our service. It soon became virtually impossible to maintain the unified contingent, and groups of veterans carrying banners soon became mixed in the swelling number of demonstrators. One group carried 1,000 flag-draped coffins in memory of those who have already died in Iraq, a poignant reminder of the human cost of the war.

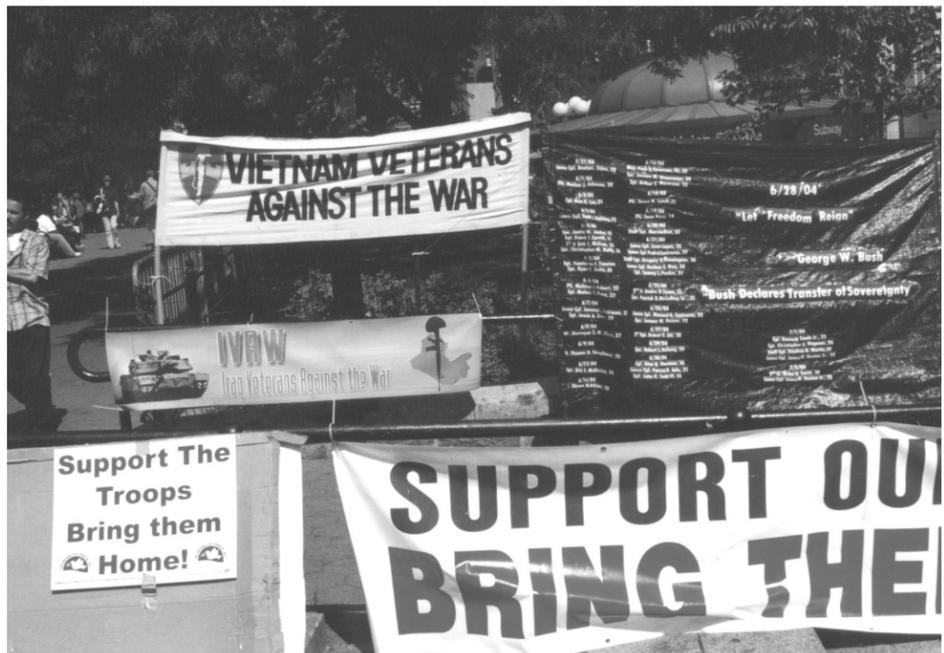
When we arrived at Madison Square Garden, we stopped and sounded off with cadence against the war and condemning the chickenhawk politicians responsible. Many gave the commander-in-chief the one-finger salute.

After passing the convention site, we marched through the midtown Herald Square shopping district. Many shoppers emerged from stores to shout along with our chants and cadences. Several small groups of counter-demonstrators had gathered there, including some fundamentalist Christians, anti-abortionists, Vietnam Veterans Against John Kerry and an assortment of other right-wingers. They verbally attacked the marchers, attempting to provoke them, but failed miserably. At one point they began chanting, "USA, USA!" — but when marchers responded by chanting the same, the counter-demonstrators looked confused and fell silent.

The march proceeded down 5th Avenue to 14th Street, where it dispersed. Some of us stayed to watch the contingents behind us coming in. There were numerous labor unions; black, Latin, Asian and Arab-American civil rights groups; senior, community and women's organizations; student and youth coalitions; Jewish and Palestinian groups; and health care, gay rights and civil liberties advocates. What we saw was a broad cross-section of the American people in the streets, united in saying "no" to the Bush agenda. Our message came through loud and clear.

VETERANS' REUNION IN CENTRAL PARK

After the march, many thousands went to Central Park, determined to assemble there despite the refusal to give us a rally site. The Great Lawn was covered with



Part of the Iraq Memorial Wall and other banners displayed at the Vigil for the Fallen

demonstrators, and the police did not interfere with this peaceful assembly for peace.

Steve Noetzel, a longtime VVAW member from San Francisco, organized a "veterans' reunion" at Summit Rock, the highest point in the park. Many longtime activists gathered there, along with IVAW and MFSO members, and a brief, moving ceremony was held. Joe Bangert "passed the torch" to the young Iraq vets who are following a similar path to that pioneered by VVAW thirty-seven years ago.

Later that evening, a free concert was held at Joe's Pub (part of the Public Theater), where singer-songwriter Stephan Smith performed and IVAW members Jimmy Massey, Rob Sarra, Mike Hoffman and Alex Ryabov spoke. MFSO cofounders Nancy Lessin and Charlie Richardson also spoke to a packed house in what was a memorable ending to a long and exciting day.

In the days that followed, we participated in several other actions, including a Rally for Veterans Healthcare Reform organized by the New York State council of Vietnam Veterans of America; a Veterans Institute for Security and Democracy forum on "Keeping Our Commitment to America's Veterans"; and the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign's "March For Our Lives."

We also took part in the American Friends Service Committee's "Eyes Wide Open" display of combat boots and sandals symbolizing the human cost of the war, which was displayed throughout the week, and nightly "Naming The Dead" ceremonies at a downtown church.

VIGIL FOR THE FALLEN

On Thursday, October 2, the last day of the RNC, VVAW members along with other veterans, military families and other concerned citizens gathered at Union Square Park, 20 blocks away, to conduct a dawn-to-dusk Vigil for the Fallen with the slogan: "We Remember: He Lied and They Died."

The vigil included part of the "Eyes Wide Open" display of combat boots and a 100-foot-long Iraq Memorial Wall bearing the names of all the soldiers killed in Iraq. There were also crosses bearing names and pictures of those from New York and New Jersey who lost their lives in Iraq.

The September Eleventh Families for Peaceful Tomorrows pulled the Stonewalk memorial for civilian casualties of war to the vigil, completing a monthlong journey begun in Boston during the Democratic convention there and down the East Coast to the Republican gathering.

Banners representing VVAW, Veterans for Peace, Iraq Vets Against the War, Military Families Speak Out, and a Disabled American Veterans chapter were displayed. Other banners with messages such as "Support the Troops — Bring Them Home Now" and "Support the Troops When They Come Home with Health Care, Jobs, Education & Housing" were displayed.

We began the program with a press conference that was covered by a number of metropolitan-area television and radio stations that continued to report the vigil regularly. Our ranks continued to swell as thousands came throughout the day to view the displays, listen to speakers and join the vigil,



Women veterans and family members at the Vigil

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Iraq Vet Speaks Truth

ROBERT SARRA

Speech given at VVAW Memorial Day event, Chicago 2004.

I am a former Marine sergeant, and a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom. I speak to you today in order to remember those Marines who were killed in action in Iraq last year and this year. I was assigned to the 1st Marine Regiment during the initial combat phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

On April 8, a day before my company reached Baghdad, we lost our first Marine to enemy fire. Pfc. Juan Garza, from Temperance, Michigan, was 20 years old and had been in the Marines for seven months when he was killed by an enemy sniper as our unit fought across the Diyala River four miles outside of eastern Baghdad.

In the ensuing months after the fall of Baghdad, my unit lost three Marines to accidents. Lance Corporal Adam Klieboker from Illinois was incinerated in an ammo dump explosion. On May 19, another Marine was severely wounded when an anti-aircraft shell he found went off in his hands. He lost his right eye, disfigured his face, and suffered shrapnel wounds to his chest and legs.

On the same day, Sergeant Kirk Straseski, from Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, who was a member of my company, drowned when he attempted to rescue the crew of a helicopter that crashed into the Shat al-Hillah Canal. The three crew members on board were killed in the crash. To date, over 790 Americans have lost their lives and countless numbers wounded in a war that hasn't been "won," but is far from being over.

My unit, the 1st Marine Regiment, left the United States on January 17 and invaded Iraq on March 21. Once we were engaged in combat operations, I felt confused. We were not fighting Iraqi regular forces but Saddam's Fedayeen. At one point we were calling the war "Desert 'Nam." We were fighting guerrillas who wore black clothing, carried AK-47s and did not adhere to our "rules." On the highway north to Baghdad we were engaging and slaughtering civilians mistakenly due to the Fedayeen and their tactics. I found myself and several of my fellow Marines asking ourselves, "What are we doing? Where are

the WMDs? Who are we fighting?"

We were told in the outset that Iraq was an imminent threat to the United States. Some Marines felt that this war was payback for September 11. Some Marines felt that we were defending our way of life. This wasn't true. How is it that if Iraq was such a threat, their own troops couldn't stop us from reaching their capital in three weeks? We never found any WMDs or signs of battlefield chemical weapons. We did however, find hundreds of caches of discarded weapons and an army throwing away their uniforms for civilian clothes so they could escape certain death and return to their homes and families. We found that once we got to Baghdad, we had no exit strategy. Some of us wondered how we were going to get back out of Iraq when we had bypassed towns teeming with guerrilla fighters. Did they expect us to fight our way out?

The supply problems that everyone talks about during the war were not what they seemed. In past conflicts, many American combat units such as the 101st Airborne at Bastogne in World War II and the 1st Marine Regiment at the Chosin Reservoir in Korea have been much worse off supply-wise in combat than we were. Yes, it is true that we were down to one MRE a day for two weeks. The fact is that we were outrunning our supplies and those supply columns were being hit by guerrillas. The only supply problem I saw was before we crossed the border.

My platoon was short on batteries for our night-vision equipment. I personally went to a nearby Army camp and bought several cases of AA batteries with the platoon commander's money from a store on base. Hardware used for mounting night-vision goggles on our helmets was also in short supply. We traded a few cartons of cigarettes with another Marine unit for 50 helmet mounts. Most importantly, there was a lack of enough ballistic plates for our body armor. Prior to crossing the border, we were told that the plates would be coming up to us as soon as they got in-country. These plates never got to us. Nevertheless, senior Marines were giving up their back ballistic plates to give to junior Marines that had none at



all. I did this, and saw my platoon sergeant and platoon commander do the same. The three of us, and several others in the platoon, went into combat with only one plate in the front of our vests, and we were frontline infantry.

The only time during the war that made any sense to us was our arrival in Baghdad. People cheered in the streets, we were thrown cartons of local cigarettes, children gave us flowers which we wore on our body armor. We all felt that this justified what we had gone through. We felt we had a purpose as we heard stories from Iraqi civilians about what Saddam did to his own people. A dictator and regime had been toppled and the people of Iraq were free of his reign. We felt as if it had all been worth it. By late April, we would move south for stabilization operations and would turn from war-fighters into humanitarians.

Once we began stabilization operations in a town called Al Hillah, 60 miles south of Baghdad, things seemed to be going well. The Iraqis were generally happy that we were there. We rebuilt schools, got the power back on, and reestablished the police and fire departments. Unfortunately, as we stayed longer, that sentiment wore off. The waves and smiles we got when we first moved in were disappearing quickly and we all had the feeling that we had overstayed our welcome. When we were told we would be going home, missions and excuses kept popping up and we were kept

in-country with no certain end in sight. This was a cause for severe frustration on all levels in my unit, as well as for our families at home. We felt as if we had done our part as combat troops.

I am not in any way angry at the Marine Corps or the military. I volunteered to join, and volunteered for the infantry knowing that at some point in my career I might, realistically, go into combat.

The Marines I served with did remarkable things under extreme conditions. Our leaders were strong and the Marines themselves did what was asked of them and upheld their reputation of being the best. We got by with very little. We improvised, adapted, overcame and showed the world that we could be both aggressive and compassionate.

Currently elements of the 1st Marine Regiment and several of my close friends are back in Iraq. They have been given responsibility of the Al Anbar province, which includes Fallujah. The 2nd Battalion 1st Marines fought for three weeks in the siege of Fallujah and lost several Marines to enemy action. The last elements of their regiment returned from Iraq only eight months ago.

Last week, I received an email from a Marine friend of mine about Echo Company 2/1. This account of action in Fallujah is from Sgt. Grit, a website dedicated to Marines. The following is an

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Vets Join Protests at RNC

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many of them veterans wearing organization garrison caps or old uniforms.

Rallies were held at 12:00 noon and 5:00 p.m. Recording artists Stephan Smith, David Rovics and Laramie Crocker played guitars and sang topical songs. Mike Hoffman, Rob Sarra, Tim Goodrich, Alex Ryabov, Ivan Medina and other recently-returned Iraq vets spoke along with Sue Niederer, Fernando Suarez del Solar and Jorge Medina, who lost their sons, and Judy Linehan, Gilda Carbonaro, Mildred McHugh and others, who had loved ones stationed in the war zone.

Veterans of past wars spoke, including Moe Fishman of the Lincoln Brigade vets; Ann Wright, a former Air Force colonel and U.S. diplomat in Afghanistan, who has become an active opponent of Bush's war; Michael McPhearson, an artillery captain in the '91 Gulf War whose son is in the Army; Stuart Edwards, who fought in Korea when the military was still segregated; Igor Bubrowsky, a Purple Heart Vietnam Marine; and Gene Glazer, a World War II medic.

At the evening program, songwriter and Desert Storm vet Dennis Kyne ("Support the Truth") was scheduled to play, but several sisters from CODEPINK: Women for Peace told us that he had been arrested on the steps of the New York Public Library earlier that day and was being held on \$500 bail. Instead of hearing



Combat boots on display at Vigil for the Fallen

his songs, we took up a collection to get him out.

Mike Vrabel, a former Air Force pilot who served in Panama, Bosnia, Somalia and the '91 Gulf War, showed up in his old flight suit and denounced the Bush administration for their misuse of our military. A former Vietnam Marine captain — who came out of the crowd and has a nephew in Iraq — angrily unloaded against the politicians in Washington. Afterwards I asked him, "You've been waiting a long time to say that, haven't you?" He replied, "Over thirty years."

VFP vice president Ellen Barfield, who had been arrested two days earlier during a "die-in" civil disobedience protest, was released that afternoon and told about the horrendous conditions that detained demonstrators and bystanders were experiencing at an abandoned pier nicknamed "Guantanamo on the Hudson."

Throughout the afternoon,

many came forward to read the names of over 1,000 American servicemen and women who have lost their lives. A bell was rung for each of them.

Representatives from United for Peace and Justice and September Eleventh Families for Peaceful Tomorrows spoke. Both programs were ended with a benediction and call to attention while bagpiper Peter Shaw played "Flowers of the Forest," a traditional lament for dead soldiers.

At one point, a group of Young Republicans, their courage amplified by alcohol, showed up to argue about the elections and the war. Our security team instructed them on proper respect in the memorial area and, while escorting them out, pointed them in the direction of a nearby military recruiting office. Instead of enlisting, they went to a nearby bar to refortify their liquid courage.

Throughout the day, many people came to show their sup-

port, to dialogue and express their views, and to stand up and be counted. Reporters mingled with the crowd, interviewing people and sending our message out to both domestic and foreign audiences.

Over 5,000 copies of the following statement were distributed to people passing by:

We are here to remember nearly 1,000 U.S. servicemen and women who have died in Iraq.

We are here to remember the many thousands of Iraqis — civilians and combatants, men and women, children and the elderly — who have been killed.

We are here to remember that these deaths did not have to happen.

We know that the current administration has plunged us into this unjust and unjustifiable war, driven by greed for oil and lust for power and fueled by lie

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Iraq Vet Speaks Truth

continued from previous page

account from 1st Sgt. Bill Skiles of Echo Co. 2nd Bn 1st Marine Regiment:

Currently Co. "E" 2/1 has 40 wounded and 3 KIA's....wild huh?...mostly small shrapnel and eardrums, but had a Marine lose an arm and 1, a leg ...This place is too messed up to explain...We have been living in the northwest of Fallujah for 3 weeks now... Actually living in some homes we confiscated...across from us about 300 yards is the downtown area of Fallujah...We are shot at every night. We are mortared a lot as well...We always are firing back with our snipers and/or machine guns....It's almost surreal. We could be playing cards. we hear

gunshots and booms. we keep playing....no big deal. I have to tell you about our gun battle today. We started receiving sniper fire from this Mosque/ tower...then some bad guys threw grenades at our pos. on our roofs...Marines got wounded and Marines fought the enemy close in. Frags were thrown and massive 5.56 was used in close proximity. I've never been shot at so much in my life. AK's were firing at us 10 yards away...I would fire my M-16 with one hand while I was running back and forth....OH MY GOD>>> I think Carl Lewis would be proud of my speed getting our wounded boys loaded up for medevac. Anyway, 8 wounded today, 1 died....I actually broke down and had the chaplain say a

prayer while I hugged this guys head....He was a good Marine....I am back in the rear tonight to rest my hurt back and rest my brain... NEVER have I had so much blood around me....I take these boys too personal sometimes....We ARE the purple Heart Company..152 strength, 40 WIA, 3 KIA...1/3 of the company ...

Approximately two weeks ago, I heard from another friend of mine at Camp Pendleton that 250 Marines were deployed to Iraq in order to replace Marines that were killed and wounded during the siege of Fallujah. Marines are now out of Fallujah, but are still in the Al Anbar province. Their estimated time of return to the United States is supposedly in the next five months. Although these Marines are due for rotation,

more Marines are being deployed as we speak.

Today is an important day for the families of the fallen servicemen from not only Iraq, but all the past conflicts our country has been involved in. The main thing I ask everyone to leave here with today is this: No matter if you agree or disagree with the war in Iraq, have a loved one overseas or not, we must support all those who are currently deployed, and those who have fought and died for our freedom to speak out as we do today.

I would like to conclude by thanking VVAW, Barry Romo, and Military Families Speak Out for the opportunity to speak today.

Thank you.



Vets Join Protests at RNC

continued from previous page

after lie!

We cannot remain silent.

We want an end to the occupation so the Iraqi people can determine their own destiny free from foreign interference and control.

We want our troops brought home now. Don't ask these men and women to continue to die for political mistakes and lies.

And we want them treated right when they return. Give them the benefits they were promised and give them the help they will need to heal their bodies, their minds and their spirits.

We are here to remember, to honor and to mourn. We will not forget!

As darkness fell, we took down the various displays and memorials and headed home, bone-tired but proud that we had carried off such a successful operation.

IN CONCLUSION

The various actions that VVAW members helped organize and carry out throughout the week were some of the most ambitious and well-organized activities that we have conducted in many years. The participation and volunteer spirit of so many and the inter-organizational cooperation that developed was truly an inspiration.

I believe that one day people will look back in remembrance of what happened in New York City during the RNC and realize that it was an important step in turning our country away from the dangerous course that those in power have set us on. And when we look back, we will be proud in the knowledge that "soldiers like us helped it in the turning."



DAVID CLINE IS A VVAW NATIONAL COORDINATOR.



VVAW member Jim Murphy talks to a reporter about the display of crosses representing those from New York state who have died in Iraq

On Ambush

20 July 1969

Piercing the night, from the right,
the RTO whispered, "Brothers,
an American is walking on the moon!"

We all looked up, then forward,
into some poor papasan's
thousand-year-old rice paddy,
pulverized by our planes
into round puddles of puppy shit.

Some dead serious, totally sane,
nineteen-year-old Boonierat said,
"I don't see him out there."

Dave Connolly is a longtime VVAW member who served with the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment.

A Space in Time

20 July 2004

Someone in the crowd
at the family barbecue said,
"Thirty-five years ago today,
a man walked on the moon."

I thought of Neil Armstrong,
the Earth shining so blue over him,
taking that historic step down into
the field of craters before him.

I thought of me, on ambush,
looking up at that bright moon,
the rice paddies, lit up before me,
pockmarked by our bombs.

We were brothers-in-arms then,
Neil and I, separated
only by thin air, both of us
a long, long way from America,

the two of us hoping against hope
we'd be home soon,
the kid in the foxhole
and the man on the moon.



Why I Joined the VVAW

KENNETH A. DALTON

Since the time I was a little boy, I always wanted to follow in my grandfather's and uncle's footprints and join the Navy. As a boy I was a member of a local Sea Scout unit, and while I was in my senior year of high school I joined a Naval Reserve Unit in my hometown of Clifton, New Jersey. I was so proud to be a member of that unit and wear the uniform of my country that I participated in extra duties like funeral details and parades. One such funeral was in Spring Valley, New York in early 1970 for a young sailor killed in Vietnam.

Upon graduation from high school I couldn't get enough Navy, so I opted to go from the reserves to the regular USN five days after graduation. One thing led to another, and I wound up on the USS Monticello (LSD-35) heading towards Diego Garcia and Vietnam in 1971. Soon after my first deployment, the Pentagon Papers were released, and I can remember the feeling of betrayal I felt back then. All I was ever taught to believe about my country and its leaders turned out to be crap.

After my service experience, I found myself always questioning

politicians and flag-wavers alike. I found myself on the outs with my co-workers at the Clifton Fire Department for questioning the first Gulf War.

Now that we're all seeing déjà vu all over again. I just couldn't sit by and let another Bush get away with murder, so I contacted the VVAW and joined the ranks.

I have to say one of the proudest days of my life was when I participated in the August 29 march in New York City against Bush Jr. and the chickenhawks of the Republican Party. Marching

with veterans from every war since World War II to the present — not for what's acceptable, but for what is right — was an experience I'll never forget.

Everywhere I go, I always hear people bitching about Bush and his Iraq quagmire; for me, bitching just isn't enough anymore. It's now time to get active.



KENNETH DALTON IS A VIETNAM VET AND MEMBER OF VVAW FROM NEW JERSEY.

Art as Politics & Propaganda

BILLY X. CURMANO

Artists have always been several steps ahead of the masses, predicting and at times guiding society. From the earliest cave painters to the present, visual images have guided and informed human behavior.

The recruiting posters that inspire nationalism over self-interest and a patriotic march to war are followed, or at times preceded, by placards that protest the very same. Blatant Madison Avenue and corporate calls to consumerism are tempered by labor and environmental warnings.

The failed art student, Adolph Hitler, knew well the power of the visual image. He designed symbols for the Nazi party. He encouraged an art of the state with exhibitions and propaganda films. One of the most famous Nazi exhibitions, "Degenerate Art," was intended to ostracize progressive artists of his day. Sometimes simply making art may be viewed as political, especially as it travels outside the accepted bounds of society.

When I returned from Vietnam in 1969, I was pissed off. People didn't understand the look of death in my eyes. I stumbled upon what would become the Milwaukee VVAW chapter camped out and occupying the University's front lawn. I went and got my tent.

I have the dubious distinction of being the first person arrested in the Student Strike at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Hmm... would that be social conscience, PTSD, or overexuberance? A couple more mishaps, and I realized people pulled from the streets — unless in a truly significant

act — just became casualties and created court costs that drained the anti-war movement. I didn't give up activism, but I vowed to play smarter.

I directed my anger into art and hoped to win some hearts and minds. I joined VVAW's Badger Liberation Tribe Theater, a hit-and-run guerilla troupe, and produced graphics and cartoons from my studio. It seemed to work and has remained my formula for over 35 years.

Earlier this year, I was asked to represent VVAW and perform at a Vets for Peace gathering near Red Wing, Minnesota. In going through my archives to create a portable display, I was delighted to find posters and photos from the likes of the Gainesville Conspiracy Trial, Nicaragua Delegation, American Indian Movement and so on. Additionally, I had collected work from other progressive artists around the world.

With a highly-charged political season at hand, I approached the Winona Arts Center and Film Society about squeezing in an extra show with a sense of political history. They gave me the honor of curating "Art as Politics & Propaganda," and VVAW was well-represented.

Besides my own work and the Art Works USA collection, Ron Luchau, a founding member of the Missoula, Montana chapter of VVAW, did a poetry reading at the opening. He also supplied handcrafted Native American ceremonial items from the *inipi*. Ironically, even though

Americans tend to hold freedoms and especially the "freedom of religion" dear, this Native American spiritual practice was outlawed by the U.S. government until as recently as the late 1970s.

Videographer Mic Terry, formerly with the Chicago chapter, has relocated to New Zealand, but that didn't stop him from sending four highly-charged graphics. His video clip from a VVAW demonstration in front of the American embassy in Managua, Nicaragua during the Contra War was also included.

"Art as Politics & Propaganda" had masters from original cartoons like our own "Oxy the Smart Bomb," posters and silk-screened prints. There were hand-painted banners from VVAW and the Central America Resource Alliance. True to the "Art as Politics & Propaganda" theme, the Winona Film Society presented the documentary "Fog of War." Photographs, videos, political buttons, photo offset posters and lithos rounded out the display.

Northern Sun Merchandising in Minneapolis and the Center for the Study of Political Graphics in Los Angeles generously provided posters like "Rosie the Riveter," "Bathroom Bolsheviks" (circa 1930) and "War is not Healthy for Children and Other Living Things." Both organizations are a great source for political paraphernalia. There were also items from the Foundation for the Community of Artists, the American Indian Movement, Art Against Apartheid, Visual AIDS, Mississippi River Revival, and Art Not Arms for Central America. It seems especially appropriate in these volatile times to present some images that may well have changed opinions, provided inspirations, guided actions or even just been completely ignored.



BILLY CURMANO IS THE VVAW CONTACT FOR MINNESOTA AND CREATOR OF "OXY, THE SMART BOMB."



Honored Glory

Arlington National Cemetery, July 2004

“Here lies in
honored glory
an American soldier
known only to God ...”

Here, lies are solemn.

Here, lies are told
in the cadence of boot heels ringing on stone,
in the snap of a bolt shooting home
in the breach of a polished rifle, held at port arms
in white-gloved hands.

Here, we fold our flag
and tell ourselves
the soldier died bravely
in a just cause.

Dead men cannot lie.
Here, all causes are lost.

Here, the living let stones tell the lies
the dead cannot.
To soothe sore hearts, tales are told
of glory in battle,
and courage under fire.

Here, the paths of glory
discolor marble
a shade of brown like dried blood
scuffed into the paving stones
by the slow turn
and turnabout march
of the Guard of Honor
in roped-off sacred ground
in front of the Tomb of the Unknown.

Here, lies are told by presidents and generals.
Here, chiseled stone names no names.
Here, the truth lies sleeping under stone.

Under lies, the truth rests,
but not in peace.
The dead have chisels that cut the heart.

Dana Patillo



*Laurie Sandow, unknown VVAW member and Robert Muller
at anti-war march, 1971-72, NYC*



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Up Close & Personal

An Awakening

ROBERT W. GAINES

In January 2002 the dust had long settled in downtown New York and the fog of jingoism was lifting elsewhere. The media started reporting a few unflattering details of the USA PATRIOT Act. Their criticism, however meek, caught my attention. I decided to quit reading the news and began analyzing it instead.

Years ago I developed a "Triangulation Hypothesis," which is simply a method for discerning facts through three or more independent sources. As I jumped from the BBC to the *Wall Street Journal* and even occasionally Al-Jazeera, a startling realization came over me: we are being lied to on an unequalled scale.

One of the greatest American minds, Noam Chomsky, recommends looking at the back page of any newspaper for the truth. Journalists use an "inverted pyramid" method of writing, putting the least important items at the bottom of an article. Unfortunately, that is where they are burying the only scraps of anything resembling honest and forthright reporting. We know now, far too late, that there was more to the stories of the USA PATRIOT Act, Afghanistan, bin Laden, Iraq, the Taliban, and WMDs.

This wasn't the first time I had been subjected to such a massive propaganda campaign. Fresh out of high school in 1990, I bought into the spin regarding Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Sure, I was reading the paper, but with

zero critical analysis. The clear and present danger Iraq posed was far too great to ignore. In short, I was consumed with a virulent brand of uninformed patriotism.

I soon joined the U.S. Army and chose a combat specialty. I remember a recruiter urging me to choose a career more appropriate to my test scores, but I had no desire to be a desk jockey; I was there to kill some "ragheads," and I chose a job that would help me do just that. Thankfully, the Army

from Panama, Vietnam, Korea, World War II, and even one from World War I helped me see the cost of war in human terms.

Active-duty GIs and retired and disabled veterans flooded our hospital daily. To call their medical treatment inadequate would be a gross understatement. What was equally obvious was the fact that I had to reassess my misconceptions of war, particularly its glorification. Around this time the Gulf War syndrome was gaining a bit

shaken again by the details of the USA PATRIOT Act. Anger, denial, outrage, disgust and more; I went through the buffet of human emotions and heaped my plate.

When our boots hit the sand in Iraq, I made no attempt to hide my disagreement with the government's actions. Some friends and family began to question my patriotism. In one particularly heated conversation the word "traitor" was not used towards me, but it was clearly implied—by a person who had not served, making the attack even more inexcusable.

Thankfully, groups like Vietnam Veterans Against the War provided the necessary fellowship I needed; it was good to know that I wasn't the subversive pariah I was being treated like. For most of 2002 and 2003 I was solidly in the minority regarding Iraq and American foreign policy in general. It wasn't until earlier this year that many began shifting their support away from the war.

It is tough to stay ahead of the spin, though; the 9/11 attacks silenced a great number of dissenters and even managed to change a few doves into hawks. Then people began to rally against the war in Afghanistan and they were quickly vilified as not supporting the troops. The same people promoting these lies were sending undertrained, underequipped and understaffed units of soldiers to fight in battles with non-specific goals or timelines. The absolute insanity of it is difficult to stomach.

I remember the faces that lined the wall at my old unit in Germany detailing our chain of command. Some left, and a few were promoted to the highest levels of office. Horrific mistakes were made then, and many are being made now. Today I am fully awake, and so are many others. The sanctity of human life does not depend on sex, race, sexual preference, creed, or nationality. An incalculable mistake is being made in Iraq, and time is of the essence to remedy it. I look forward to the day when those who stood peacefully (yet firmly) against this war can look back with pride at their contribution to ending the bloodshed.



ROBERT W. GAINES IS A VETERAN WHO SERVED IN THE ARMY FROM 1990 TO 1998 AND A MEMBER OF VVAW.

Thankfully, groups like Vietnam Veterans Against the War provided the necessary fellowship I needed; it was good to know that I wasn't the subversive pariah I was being treated like.

didn't send me anywhere near a battlefield.

When the war in Kuwait began to wind down, the weapon system I specialized in was replaced, and I was technically out of a job. An opportunity in the medical field appeared, and I chose to train as an X-ray tech. Once I began working in a hospital I was exposed firsthand to the injuries sustained by soldiers. This was not limited to the Gulf War. Veterans

of attention in the media and in the halls of the hospital.

The syndrome was my first introduction to a conspiracy theory. Sure, the government had us believing in a magic bullet for Kennedy, but I was witnessing this one directly from my own grassy knoll. I remember the government repeatedly denying anything that came out of a Gulf veteran's mouth. Reports of being gassed by the enemy, forced inoculations, and adverse reactions to inoculations were dismissed out of hand. A superior once said to me, "Admit nothing, deny everything, and demand proof"—a sad but fitting quote of the prevailing mode of operation.

I didn't need an M.D. after my name to clearly see that some of the Gulf veterans were ill. I also remember the indignation with which the Army treated the soldiers and their medical claims. A common quote by health professionals at the time was: "It's all in their head." Now we know that is a lie. Some soldiers were gassed; a few were forcibly given injections, and there were cases that injected substances later caused illness.

Shortly after I ended my eight years of active duty I started nodding off and went to sleep with the rest of the country. That slumber was interrupted in September 2001, and then I was

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Geny Binder, Australian Veterans for Peace



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Supporting Our Soldiers

GREGORY A. HELLE

Recently I met a boy, a Marine who had returned from Iraq. He spent his leave constantly drinking. He went back on duty, doing only what he had to, and drinking his nights away. His “I don’t give a damn” attitude caused an event to happen that has put him in the brig for five years, five years without the real help he needs for the traumas he experienced. I met another boy who was raped in the Navy and later beat his rapist. He ended in the brig and received a dishonorable discharge. Again, no help for his trauma. I also met a young female soldier who was in Iraq. She saw way too much and then was wounded. She has severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Will she get the help she needs to help her experience the life she fought for? There is also the returning vet who was a good family man, respected in his community, holding down a good job. After he came home, his marriage disintegrated, he lost his job, and he was arrested six times for alcohol-related offenses. They found him hanging from a bridge. What are we doing to our children?

What are we doing for our heroes? I understand them, because I am one of them.

As I drive through my community I see the flags and bumper stickers that say “Support our Troops” and “Pray for our Troops.” This is good, but it seems to only have meaning while the troops are a world away from us — not when they return home. Soldiers are facing a very real fear that they will come home different people than the ones who left. If you have been in combat, if you have been raped by a comrade-in-arms, you know why. I have seen this side of life, and I know it is hard for people to understand unless they have experienced it for themselves. When our heroes return from Afghanistan and Iraq, after putting their lives on the line for our country, we owe them whatever we can do. Without the heroes of war, we would not be free, and all who go to war are heroes.

Bureaucracy prevents so many from getting help. This causes them to live isolated, afraid of the very people who were their

friends and family. Forty percent of the homeless in our country are veterans. Suicide is an epidemic among veterans of all wars. What can you do? I can advise you from my own experience how best to bring about change. Sure, you can write your senators and congressmen, to request the Department of Veterans Affairs be more supportive for our soldiers. But more importantly, you can learn more about the problem and get involved. The next PTSD victim may be a friend or a member of your family.

I am the chaplain for a non-profit organization called PTSD Alliance (www.ptsd-alliance.org) which provides peer counseling to help those suffering with PTSD. Often, it is easier for a PTSD survivor to talk to someone who has been there. This has been my role for several years after facing and dealing with PTSD myself. I am assisted by dozens of volunteers, but there is so much support needed for those who are unaware that our support exists. There is a brick wall between the PTSD Alliance and the public, the

churches, the corporations, and the politicians.

PTSD is a disease that few in the public sector know anything about. Even fewer of us have any desire to learn more about what we have many times referred to as “battle fatigue” or “shell shock.” I have written two books about PTSD and its effects. It is not pretty, but it is reality.

We as Americans have an obligation to those who protect our freedom. Too many of us take those freedoms for granted. I plead with all Americans to support the needs of these new veterans; these new heroes. Give of your time, give of your money, write letters — do something to make sure we do not have another lost generation. And in every way possible, learn about this debilitating disease and help our returning heroes cope with the world they find after war. Thank you.



NYRB

MARC LEVY

Here is a true story: I put a personal ad in the *New York Review of Books*:

SWM, 53, Gloucester, MA, trim, bright, affectionate, easy on the eye, 'Nam vet, a bit stressed out, seeks attractive SWF with similar traumatic background for LTR.

Nine women replied. A war correspondent from Zimbabwe who visits the United States every six months said, “Would you like to

be my pen pal?” A wealthy woman in Maine said her ex worked as a shrink in New York. “Maybe you should see him,” she said. “If he thinks you’re not crazy, we can date.” A woman in Ipswich, Massachusetts wrote: “Does it have to be a specific trauma or just some ordinary thing? OK, I have to go now, the Patriots are on.” A gal from Long Island sent a whale-sized JPEG and her unlisted number. She didn’t know where Gloucester was. “But I hope you

call real soon,” she said. A woman in Florida said her husband was ex-CIA, stressed out from combat in Asia, Africa, Central America, gave her permission to have an affair. “I weigh one hundred fifty pounds and have nice breasts,” she said. Her husband liked to watch her get it on. She said after we had fun in Florida they would come visit my place. I tore that one up quick. A woman from San Diego wrote a long, witty letter. Her name was Sandy. She was sweet and

was so damn quick and insightful, could talk the horns off a stuffed elk in late July, it was impossible to like her. She nailed me on that. “I’m doing all the work and you’re not,” she said. I said, “You’re right. The spark is gone.”

So the trip, the one she proposed where we meet at a Motel 6 in Milwaukee, separate rooms (which I reserved), no hanky-panky, see if we connect, got nixed. We parted amicably, as much as two people on either end of the United States can amicably part.

No problem with the reserved rooms, but the airline would not refund my plane ticket. Nor would the credit card people. I said please, they said no. I said I’ll cough up but cancel the account. They did. The end.



MARC LEVY SERVED WITH D 1/7 CAV IN VIETNAM/CAMBODIA ‘70 AS AN INFANTRY MEDIC. HIS SHORT STORY “HOW STEVIE NEARLY LOST THE WAR” WAS PUBLISHED IN NEW MILLENNIUM WRITINGS, ISSUE 14 (2004-2005).



bright and had once worked in Hollywood. We traded one hundred emails. We had long phone conversations. I googled Sandy. She had made lots of movies, and was the ex-wife of Robert Blake. He acted unkindly toward her, and in 1984 Sandy bailed out.

The short of it: After a time, because Sandy

Purple and Broken Hearts

DENNIS SERDEL PERRY

I was drafted in October 1966 along with two guys I went to high school with. After basic training and advanced infantry training, they cut the orders for us. One lucked out and went to Fort Reilly, Kansas and was a clerk for the rest of his two years' drafted time; he hated it. Another went to 1st Air Cav for training and then to combat infantry in Vietnam. I went to Hawaii for advanced jungle training and then to Vietnam combat infantry in the new Americal Division.

The rule in 1967 was that if you were wounded two times, they took you out of the infantry and sent you in the back or back to the United States. The problem in Vietnam, like in Iraq, was that most of our wounds were shrapnel. Thus, with the heavy fighting in

'67 to '68, many soldiers were getting hit once, but with multiple wounds. So during our tour, the military changed the rules and said we had to be hit three times to get out of the field.

Comparing notes with my one high school buddy who was in 1st Cav, he told me he was hit three times and the Army would not take him out of the fighting. His father had to write and personally visit his senator to get his son out of the fighting after being wounded three times. He asked, "Will you only be happy when my son comes home dead? You can only get wounded so many times before the bullet or shrapnel doesn't just wound you but hits it mark and kills you." Only after all that did they take his son out of the field.

Comparing notes when we

came home I found that everyone (except for one who contracted malaria) in our original company was wounded at least once.

Only 18% of us actually fought the war, so I'm confused nowadays just "how wounded" Americans think a soldier should be to get a Purple Heart. It seems that if you have both legs and an arm blown off, Americans believe you should get a Purple Heart. But I know that I bandaged a machine gunner of ours when a bullet grazed his shoulder, but he acted as if it didn't even bother him. Now do Americans think that he should get the Purple Heart? One of my best buddies got a little shrapnel in his leg and spent a month on a hospital ship just offshore 'Nam and then went right back to combat. Should he

get a Purple Heart?

The ones who complain the loudest about Purple Hearts are usually the chickenhawks. Medals don't mean a thing.

The anger combat Vietnam vets have is based on the following:

Don't send us to war unless you have a damn good reason. Don't send us to a war where your real purpose is to let it drag on so the war profiteers can make more money. Don't send us to free people who do not want to be freed, but hate us soldiers and just want us to get out of there. Don't send us to a war unless 90% of the American public will back us. And don't blame us for war crimes when the nature of war turns human beings into animals.



Someone Else's Kids

DOUGLAS NELSON

This piece is a response to an article in a local paper congratulating suburban Virginia for sending their kids to college and not to Iraq.

I am troubled today that we affluent suburbanites are congratulating ourselves on sending our children to college instead of to Iraq. Have we written off the kids in Iraq as "someone else's kids"? Too bad they come home with their faces blown off. Our kids are safe at Georgetown and the University of Virginia.

Whether through our fear, our apathy or our stupidity, we have placed other people's children in a war we have no idea how to fight. Occupying Iraq is in no way "defending America," unless one believes that the oil under Iraq is, in fact, ours because we burn up more of it than we can produce ourselves. I resent the lie these kids are told, because I was told the same lie.

I went to Vietnam, not because I was patriotic, but because I dropped out of college. It took nights of discussion with my peers and lots of reading before I realized that I was not defending my country at all. History has exonerated the Sixties protesters and their professors. For all their boisterous self-righteousness, they were right.

Those who are so eager today to send our kids to war considered

themselves too good to go to war as young men. In some cases, their elders advised them of ways to get out of combat. Could it be that they were all smart enough to see that the war in Vietnam was not

eager to serve in the military after 9/11 because they saw a clear need to defend their country against the very people who attacked us. I think that this false connection of "terrorism" to Iraq betrays their

I want these kids out of there and home before we have 57,000 more of our kids' names on a wall.

worth their lives? How strange it is that they denigrate John Kerry for reaching the same conclusion after he went to war and served with distinction.

I believe that, deep down, we don't really want this war in Iraq. Will we see *Pioneer* contributors and Halliburton execs throw a gala bash and invite the military recruiters to talk to their children? Do military recruiters visit posh private schools? I don't think so.

If going to Iraq is not right for their children, then it is not right for ours. In our efforts to push the responsibility for this war off on someone else, we have forgotten that those we have sent to Iraq are our American kids, every one of them.

We have a de facto draft, in which people who have little hope of education or jobs turn to military service. Many young people were

trust in us, and makes a mockery of their willingness to serve.

The active-duty troops, Reserve and Guard in Iraq are exhausted. We cannot continue to send these people back for years at a time. We must either decide that we made a mistake, and pull them all out, or bring in many more fresh, well-trained troops. I am afraid that both Bush and Kerry would institute the draft.

The only fair draft would be to call up everyone: men and women, rich and poor, with no deferments for college and no lottery. May I make a prediction? Middle-class people of affluence will take to the streets rather than see their children sent to Iraq. Real opposition to the Vietnam war began with parents of children facing the draft. It was fine, was it not, when "other people's kids" had to go?

This is not World War II. There is no threat to America that cannot be met with diplomatic, intelligence and military professionals, from every member country of the United Nations, doing their jobs with minimal interference from administration ideologues.

It is time to treat the Iraqis as adults. If their infrastructure is broken it is because they broke it. They will not adopt our form of government because we kill thousands of them, sow their land with radioactive munitions and torture detainees. Our war in Iraq is a tragic mistake. I want these kids out of there and home before we have 57,000 more of our kids' names on a wall. I want the best of VA education and health care for those who have served, not cuts in the Department of Veterans Affairs budget.

Do we love them enough to admit we made a mistake and bring them home?



DOUG NELSON IS A NORTHERN VIRGINIA CONTACT FOR VVAW. HE IS RETIRED FROM U.S. CIVIL SERVICE ("DEFENSE DEPARTMENT BEFORE IT BECAME THE OFFENSE DEPARTMENT"). HE SERVED IN VIETNAM IN 1968 WITH THE 371ST RADIO RESEARCH COMPANY.

Author Disagrees with Review

Dear Editors:

Kurt Hilgendorf's "This History's Bunk" is the single most mean-spirited, vindictive, and dishonest review of my book "Home to War," bar none. This is highly ironic, at the least, since VVAW is an organization I have supported wholeheartedly, both with my words and my cash, since the late 1980s.

According to Mr. Hilgendorf, "Home to War" "does no justice to the history of the veterans' movement." Frankly, in over 20 years of close association with the veterans' movement, I never heard of Mr. Hilgendorf. Among my friends, I have numbered dozens of VVAW members, many of them near-founders, including Ron Kovic, Randy Barnes, Bill Crandell, Jack McCloskey, Lee Thorn, Bill Ehrhart, Bob Waddell, Steve Hassna, Scott Camil, Bill Unger, Tom Ashby, Annie Luginbill and Joel Greenberg, John Kniffin, and Wayne Beverly — among others. And the praise for "Home to War" among VVAW members has been manifold.

So who is left to establish my supposedly enormous "historical inaccuracies"? Mr. Hilgendorf trots out none other than Mike Uhl, who wrote an equally dishonest review of "Home to War" in *The Nation*. I responded to the welter of false charges by Mr. Uhl in a long letter to *The Nation*, which was published on their website. Among other dishonest shots, Mr. Uhl charged me with ignoring the important historical work "The Turning" by Andrew Hunt — when the fact is that Mr. Hunt actually came to me for help, since I was much farther along in my research than he back in the early 1990s. Mr. Uhl knew this full well, yet trumpeted my supposed ignorance of another historian in the field as one more "strike" against me. The real clincher in Mr. Uhl's duplicity was that — for whatever reason, perhaps to ingratiate himself with the Kerry campaign — he wrote an unctuously praiseful review in the *Boston Globe* (Jan. 18, 2004) of Douglas Brinkley's biography of Kerry, "Tour of Duty." Yet the irony is that Douglas Brinkley has acknowledged large borrowings in his book from my own book, "Home to War." So if "Home to War" is so inaccurate, how can a book that was based on it be so wonderfully accurate? Surely Mr.

Uhl's inconsistency, if nothing else, is showing.

As for Mr. Hilgendorf's own duplicity, there are numerous examples. For the sake of brevity, let me just examine one in detail. Mr. Hilgendorf is outraged that I dare to print the opinion of journalist Richard Boyle, that the VVAW should have pushed harder to force a meeting with Richard Nixon at the Fontainebleau Hotel in 1972, rather than acceding to Barry Romo's order to stay briefly on the street, then retreat back to their camp in Flamingo Park. Boyle is presented by Hilgendorf as someone with "no history as an organizer." Boyle not only covered the Vietnam War as a front-lines correspondent; he was the first journalist to break the story of the mutiny of Alpha Company at Firebase Pace on the Cambodian border in 1971 — a story that shook the nation. He has been an activist and war protester all his life, and was deeply involved in the protests against U.S. military aid to the dictatorship in El Salvador and to the Contras in Nicaragua. His exploits were chronicled in Oliver Stone's movie "Salvador" — his part played by James Wood. The opinion of such a man ought to at least be heard.

But again, here's the clincher. Immediately after giving Richard Boyle's take, I print Barry Romo's challenge to Boyle's credibility (p. 243): "But Romo, who served in VVAW for decades afterward, maintains that his motivation was to keep the demonstration intact, and that it was his job as 'tactical leader' to judge 'how far we could push the situation.' In this case, he judged that more good would be achieved by remaining on the street than by falling for an obvious government ploy. 'They (Kovic and two other wheelchair vets) weren't gonna meet with Nixon. You can bet on that,' Romo asserts. 'If Boyle thinks Richard Nixon was meeting with Ron Kovic, give him something else to smoke ...'" Mr. Hilgendorf does not even mention my attempt — here as elsewhere — to give both sides of events.

In truth, I found the "bunk" in Mr. Hilgendorf's review virtually endless:

1. He says I don't show the effects of the Gainesville Trial on VVAW. I talk at length about Barry Romo's decision to support the defendants, and how the cost of the trial both

bankrupted the organization's treasury and physically and emotionally exhausted most of the VVAW combatants.

2. He says I wrote only about "stars" like John Kerry and Ron Kovic — not "regular people." I wrote at length about Angel Almedina, Max Inglett, Tom Ashby, Dave Currie, Jim Hopkins, Jan Barry, Carl Rogers, Larry Rottmann, Shelley Ramsdell, Michael Ryan, Frank McCarthy, John Musgrave, Jack McCloskey, Ron Bitzer, Sam Schorr, Al Hubbard, Scott Moore, and a host of others. Aren't these "regular people"? Even more dishonestly, Mr. Hilgendorf claims I ignore the "regular people" involved in the work on PTSD. I spend pages on Jack Smith, Art Egendorf, Shad Meshad, Jack McCloskey, Sarah Haley, and many other PTSD pioneers. Again, aren't these "regular people"? As for Mr. Hilgendorf's scorn for "getting a definition (of PTSD) into a book," the fact that the definition finally got into the book (DSM-III) has led to tens of thousands of Vietnam veterans receiving the substantial monetary compensation they had been denied for over a decade.

3. Perhaps nothing makes Mr. Hilgendorf as furious as my "privileging" Ron Kovic's American Veterans Movement (AVM) by devoting several pages to it — but only a small fraction of the hundreds of pages I devote to VVAW. Whatever one may think of Ron Kovic the person, his enormous historical importance is undeniable. Forget, for a moment, even his tremendously influential, now classic autobiography "Born on the Fourth of July." The accomplishments of the short-lived AVM were stunning — not least of which, the toppling of the VA's inept administrator, Donald Johnson. Nor do I spare Kovic's egomania and excessively optimistic plans. I quote VVAW members Jack McCloskey and Lee Thorn at length about the folly of Kovic's lone wolf approach — and I also reveal the pitiful showing at Kovic's Second Bonus March — which Bob Waddell labels, and I even quote in my book: "The Second Boner March."

4. I am taken to task for criticizing VVAW's attempted replay of Dewey Canyon in 1974. Many stalwart VVAW supporters, in-

cluding Danny Friedman and Gloria Emerson, have spoken to me of the disastrous results of that confrontational demonstration.

5. Finally, let me address the preposterousness of Mr. Hilgendorf's assertion that the history of a movement should be written without referring to "individuals." Does he believe that a movement is some sort of alien being that lands on earthy fully manifested of its own accord? A movement exists because of the work of many individuals, and I chronicle the work of hundreds of them in the pages of "Home to War" — including Maude De Victor, whom Mr. Hilgendorf accuses me of slighting, but whose story is there (just check the index) along with the story of another "regular person," Paul Reutershan, whose tragedy Mrs. De Victor helped to bring to public attention. And the good work of VVAW on the Agent Orange cause in the late 1970s and 1980s is fully detailed in thousands of words on pages 490-494.

In a final gratuitous insult, Mr. Hilgendorf accuses me of writing my history on the sole strength and credentials of "just a book contract." In fact, I have immersed myself in veterans' activism for more than 20 years, attended hundreds of meetings of veterans' groups, read hundreds of books on Vietnam veteran activism and the Vietnam War, and developed friendships with many activist veterans of several different wars, including Howard Zinn (World War II), John Schultz and Joe Grant (Korean), Brian Willson, Charlie Liteky, Freddy Champagne, Joe McDonald, Rose Sandecki, Ron Kovic, Scott Camil, Ron Bitzer, Randy Barnes, Lily Adams, Steve Suwalsky, Bill Ehrhart, Ted Sexauer, Mike Blecker, Bob Mulholland, and Jim Janko (Vietnam), Dan Buckman (Central America), and Dan Fahey, Paul Sullivan, and Tony Swofford (Gulf) — as well as a lot more, many, unfortunately, who have already died, like Waddell and McCloskey. Those still alive, I'm sure, would be happy to testify to my good faith and commitment.

Yours truly,

Gerald Nicosia

Hilgendorf Responds

My review of Gerry Nicosia's "Home to War" in the Spring 2004 *Veteran* offered three main critiques:

1. The book suffers from numerous historical inaccuracies.
2. Through his tone, use of language, and narratives of events, Nicosia positions himself as the enlightened liberal observer who is intellectually superior to the more radical VVAW leadership of the early 1970s. As a result, every VVAW action after Dewey Canyon III, driven by leaders whose sole motivation was dogmatic political ideology, is made to appear ineffective at best and doomed to failure at worst.
3. As a history of a movement, the book focuses far too much on the major individual actors and not enough on the intricacies of building and sustaining an organized effort for social change.

It should also be noted that my original review was premised (and given potential book sales and Nicosia's response here I doubt that he would dispute this premise) on the book's reputation as the defining treatise on the Vietnam veteran movement. It logically follows that such a text should be held to the most rigorous standards of research and argumentation. In my opinion, "Home to War" does not meet those standards, nor does Nicosia's response satisfactorily address any of my original arguments.

With regard to historical inaccuracy, the real issue in creating a defining work is being airtight on important, relevant details. Historians are free to reach different conclusions based on the verifiable facts, but one's credibility is severely challenged when the facts are up for debate. For precisely this reason VVAW worked diligently to verify members' ranks and stories during the Winter Soldier Investigation. When it was later discovered that Al Hubbard had exaggerated his rank, VVAW was forced to undertake a serious damage-control effort, spending valuable time and money that could have gone toward protesting an unjust war, and Hubbard was forced out of the National Office. Similarly, Nicosia's historical inaccuracies leave his account open to interpretation and attack. I am not the first person to level these

charges against "Home to War." In addition to Michael Uhl's review in *The Nation* (cited in my review), Jan Barry, one of VVAW's founding members and a person Nicosia obviously respects, questioned Nicosia's account. In his 2001 review of "Home to War" for the War Resisters League, Barry writes, "Regrettably, like too much of his book, it is rife with errors. The 1967 event that inducted me into antiwar action was April 15." Nicosia incorrectly pegged the march a week earlier, on April 7. In other words, Nicosia even got VVAW's founding date wrong.

As for my second primary argument, Nicosia makes no direct response. He does, however, reference several events, which I will address here. First, Nicosia questions my interpretation of an exchange between Barry Romo and Richard Boyle at the 1972 Republican convention, arguing that he does justice to VVAW leadership. I agree with Nicosia that Boyle's fine journalistic work in Southeast Asia is indeed worthy of accolades. But my point was that Boyle was not part of organizing the event; by Nicosia's logic, because Seymour Hersh broke the stories of My Lai and Abu Ghraib he should have had a prominent role in shaping the United for Peace and Justice protest at the 2004 Republican convention. More to the point, my use of this exchange exemplifies Nicosia's wider pattern of critiquing the leadership of radicals while routinely omitting criticism of the roles of liberals. Nicosia portrays the radicals as undisciplined and spur-of-the-moment during Dewey Canyon III. Now this same group is criticized for being disciplined tactical leaders. The same amount of space is afforded both sides, but Nicosia's narrative up to this event paints Romo as irrational and even dangerous. As a result, Boyle's far-fetched idea of forcing a meeting with Nixon seems completely logical and justified, and a disciplined decision based on a democratic group process appears ill-conceived.

Second, my primary critique of Nicosia's coverage of the Gainesville Eight trial was his soap opera-esque narrative, a critique applicable to much of the rest of the book. Yes, Nicosia does explain the heavy toll the trial took on the organization. However, a reader unfamiliar with the history of VVAW would likely identify

the informants' roles and personal lives, the Miami federal agents' scandalous connections to the highest levels of the federal government, and Scott Camil's ideas about self-defense more important than the long-term organizational implications of the conspiracy trial. The trial's historical substance — the U.S. government's continuing willingness to do everything in its power to suppress dissent — is overshadowed by these tangential subplots.

Third, Nicosia refutes my take on the American Veterans Movement and its Second Bonus March and its relationship to Dewey Canyon IV. AVM, as I understand, grew out of a building takeover in California. The group did not exist, except as an idea in Ron Kovic's head, until the event was several days old. Kovic called the group the American Veterans Movement and credited the organization with a victory when in reality it had no structure or membership and couldn't be considered anything other than a highly grandiose plan. AVM's Second Bonus March drew a small fraction of the anticipated crowd and, from what I can tell, was an event of relatively minor historical importance. VVAW's Dewey Canyon IV was organized by an actual group, was actually held, and was attended by four thousand. I agree that the event was violent, but my real critique was that Nicosia painted AVM as the next great hope for veterans because it was more moderate and demanded better treatment for veterans. VVAW was demanding the same things, but because it also pushed a radical critique of exploitative American social and economic conditions, VVAW had no legitimate role in the public discourse.

In response to my final argument, Nicosia makes two main assertions: (1) he wrote about regular people, and (2) a history of a movement must include individuals. I agree, and I made such a statement in my review. However, merely presenting a laundry list of names does not address my critique of how Nicosia's narrative employed their stories. "Home to War" repeatedly emphasizes dramatic storylines while downplaying the nuts and bolts of organizing efforts. I utilized two examples: PTSD and Agent Orange. My original point about PTSD was that without vets' courageous attempts

to understand their experiences in Vietnam via rap groups and their active struggle to get treatment, vets' allies in the medical community would not have addressed the issue and the DSM would not have been changed. Likewise, had Maude DeVictor not stepped forward and had VVAW members not supported her, the horrific impact of Agent Orange might not have been exposed and no class-action lawsuit would have been possible. I believe a more effective history of the movement would have focused on the ways in which veterans' organizations employed different techniques for social change, how they learned from collective struggle, and how the struggle could have been more successful. Did Nicosia spend a few pages on VVAW's role in Agent Orange? Yes. Did he also spend perhaps a hundred pages on Victor Yannacone and make his story seem the central issue in the lawsuit? Yes. Do people reading the book consequently believe that the specific details of the trial are much more vital to the movement than the day-to-day work of sustaining a movement for veterans' rights? Yes. Do the historical lessons in "Home to War" consequently suffer from this approach? I think you know my answer.

Nicosia, in the opening paragraphs of his response, uses a quote from my review out of context. I believe the narrative to be highly flawed, but I do not believe that his book does no justice to the history of the veterans' movement; it does some. In fact, I encourage anyone willing to invest the hefty time commitment required to take on the task of reading the seven-hundred-page volume that is "Home to War." However, beware of the potentially dramatic rise in blood pressure that may occur in the process.

Finally, while I agree with the sentiment, I cannot take credit for my review's title ("This History's Bunk"). That credit duly resides with *Veteran* text wrangler Lisa Boucher. Thanks, Lisa, for the excellent finishing touch.

Kurt Hilgendorf

"A Troubling Tribute," *Jan Barry's review of "Home to War," can be found in the Commentary section of VVAW's website:*

www.vvaw.org/commentary/

Letters to the Editor

On September 14, 2004, George W. Bush addressed the National Guard convention in Las Vegas, Nevada, which just happens to be where my husband and I live. This visit by the commander in chief was not open to the public, but it was also closed to veterans of all forces except the National Guard. George Wrong started out by comparing himself to other presidents who served in the Guard — especially to Theodore Roosevelt — the one and the same Theodore Roosevelt who said, “A man who is good enough to shed his blood for his country is good enough to be given a square deal afterwards.” Bush used the Guard to avoid Vietnam and in his present office has turned his back on the veterans of not only prior wars but heartlessly on the 7,000 disabled veterans he created with his war.

The one good thing that has come out of the Bush administration has been that John and I have broken our 15-year silence (and for those you who remember the Eighties, John and Rena Kopy were anything but quiet and retiring). We have had our share of nightmares and tragedies over the past 15 years, but politically we became “uninvolved” because we

stopped believing that this country was free. Although we still do not believe that America is the “Land of the Free,” we can no longer be silent about the young men and women being killed and maimed throughout the world in the name of the United States of Bush.

It doesn't really matter who the next president is ... except, of course, that this country cannot survive four more years of the Bushmobile rambling through Americans' lives and mowing us down both here and abroad. In coming back to VVAW, a flood of memories sweep through my mind, and the one thing that stands out more than anything else is that no matter how serious and depressing our tasks were back in the early days, we laughed so hard and enjoyed what we were doing so much that it is still amazing to me that we accomplished so much with so few people and even less money.

I remember our journey to Washington, D.C. in 1981 when we camped on the Mall and VVAW members were going bookoo dinky dau left and right because we had built a perimeter and set up a base camp. My group (at my insistence: rough, tough activist

and spoiled suburban housewife that I was, I did not sleep on the ground) had brought an RV, which helped me to earn the reputation for being the best PTSD psychotherapist in America. As soon as someone flashed back, someone else yelled, “Kopy!” and I came running. Enough time has elapsed that I can tell the secret of my “great power”: I grabbed the vet and pushed him into the RV where I showed him the microwave, the TV, the refrigerator and the electric coffeemaker and kept saying, “Washington, D.C., 1981” until he came out of it!

I remember the night during the Agent Orange hearings, when we all crashed at Romo's apartment, when I told Annie Bailey that for all the times I had been in Chicago to speak at vets' groups or on the talk shows, I'd never really seen Chicago. It must have been about 2:00 a.m. when Annie decided that she was going to take me sightseeing (don't even try to imagine how stoned we were), and off we went. The only thing that neither of us took into consideration was that Annie came from Milwaukee and didn't have a clue about where she was going either. We had to call Romo's and

ask them to send out a search party because we were so lost.

I remember, with great love and clarity, when in 1986 things had gone very wrong with some of the members of AOVNJ (Agent Orange Victims of New Jersey) and there was a very humiliating trial, from which we as the leaders were exonerated, but after which I was too embarrassed and insecure to keep fighting and speaking out. One evening, Dave Cline and Clarence Fitch showed up at our home and told me that I had been booked to speak at Rutgers and then at a rally in lower Manhattan and that I'd better show up! They wouldn't listen to any arguments, and so off I went, and to this day, I believe those two bullies saved my life.

If anyone were to ask me what VVAW means to me, I think the best way for me to describe all you radicals would be: my friends, no matter what, the most caring people on the face of the Earth.

For the fight and the justice,

Rena Kopystenski

I went to one of the showings of “Going Upriver: The Long War of John Kerry.” I'd recommend everyone go. Figuring it would be a good recruiting venue, I carried my legal pad. I was about 30 cars away from my truck and went back and got a pen. Started weeping during WSI & DCIII, got some stares from folks around me for that. Think I saw me at DCIII, dirty-blond long hair and beard and black frame glasses. The first guy in the shot that pans to the left. But anyway, I stood up at the end of the showing and said, “I'm Tom Baxter. I'm the local contact for Vietnam Veterans Against the

War. We'd like former members to re-up and new members to join. We've got some projects going on and we'd like your help. I'll be out in the lobby if you'd like to talk.” A couple of folks started clapping; others came over to shake my hand. Got down to the lobby and composed myself. Talked with a dozen friendly folks. Told them about Eyes Wide Open and the Veterans Day Parade. Got their email addresses. Gave away about 30 business cards.

There were at least a couple of prime vet prospects, one old VVAW member and maybe some non-vet supporters.

I've been to the DAV and VVA meeting, where I didn't feel loved, and it looks like we're in the 11NOV2004 parade. We'll be pulling “rear guard,” which I consider the place of honor and we'll be able to stop and talk with folks without holding up the parade.

A white-bearded wrinkled white guy with a high noble forehead cuts quite a figure with tears flowing down his face and his voice cracking. Reminds me of when I spoke at a memorial service for a member in 1986. There's his face, but I can't remember his name. He was a professor and all the deans and department heads

gave really nice talks. I finally choked my talk out. I remarked to Broedel that I wished I could have given a better talk. He said, “You know why they sounded so good and you didn't? They didn't give a fuck and you did.”

Tom Baxter
USAV 1967-69
tombaxter.livejournal.com

Eyes Wide Open is an exhibit on the costs of the Iraq War. For more information, visit:
<http://afsc.org/eyes/>



POW Remembered

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hair pulled, their sores and heat blisters pinched and their bare feet stomped. One prisoner was made to sit with his legs spread and was repeatedly smacked back and forth on his inner thighs with a ping-pong paddle, making his heat sores bleed. I warned the interpreter once, and then took the paddle from his hand in mid-swing. He protested, cursing me in Vietnamese. The intelligence officer stressed the need to obtain information in order to save American lives. He told me that if I had a problem, he'd talk to the colonel and have me relieved of duty. I was confused, torn. I gave the interpreter back his paddle.

One big problem was that you didn't know your enemy. The Vietnamese would come from the village, work the base camp during the day, and return come nightfall. One night the barber was shot coming through the perimeter

wire. There was no one you could trust. Most of us didn't want to be there. We counted off the days, but the longer I was there the more I became the very thing I hated. This war was about getting me out alive, and nothing else mattered.

There was one prisoner who was treated special. He wore handcuffs behind his back. Only while he ate would we cuff him up front, then back again once he finished. He was the enemy's version of Special Forces, a sapper who could low crawl through barbed wire and trip flares like butter melts on a hot biscuit. He could wreak hours of havoc on a base camp with satchel charges and throat-slitting, then disappear back into the night. The story was he had surrendered and was working for us as a scout, a point man leading our troops through the jungle. After some time, Intelligence realized he had been leaving clues and passing

information back to the enemy. He was a double agent.

One day this prisoner walked slowly across the POW compound, appearing exhausted: head down, feet dragging. Suddenly, he burst forth like a runner from a starting block, jumped atop a bunker, and did a complete flip over the barbed wire, landing on his feet — all with his hands cuffed behind his back. In broad daylight he didn't have a prayer of getting away. Two GIs standing thirty feet outside the compound heard my cry for help. They knocked the prisoner to the ground and stomped him into the mud.

At that moment I had my awakening. Seeing this man's determination, fortitude and tenacity, I realized I was the enemy here. We didn't belong here. After this incident they put shackles on the man's ankles and had a shotgun pointing at him 24/7.

I grew up in a small town, believed in God and the goodness of people, respected adults and thought they knew best. I was

proud to be an American, had volunteered for Vietnam and wanted to do right by my country. My dreams and naiveté were shattered in Vietnam. The older enlisted men — career soldiers, lifers — were, for the most part, lowlifes. Their drunken, amoral behavior made my dad look saintly. My father was never promiscuous and never mistreated my mother. What I saw in Vietnam was rape and murder.

Today, I still live in a bunker. I am certified service-connected 100% permanent and totally disabled: what's called post traumatic stress disorder, but I prefer the World War II term "shell shock." I am not free, nor am I the price of freedom. The Vietnam War was meaningless. I see POW/MIA flags flying everywhere. They are not about prisoners missing in Southeast Asia, but those like me, among us, still missing and prisoners of the Vietnam War.



*RICHARD BOES IS A VIETNAM VET
AND MEMBER OF VVAW FROM NEW
YORK.*

A Soldier

Not a sacred warrior,
Nor with a bayonet blessed by God,

Not even a human being,
Just a simple peasant ... a surrogate,
A sacrificial lamb, a frightened child,
Chosen by the rich to be an instrument of war,

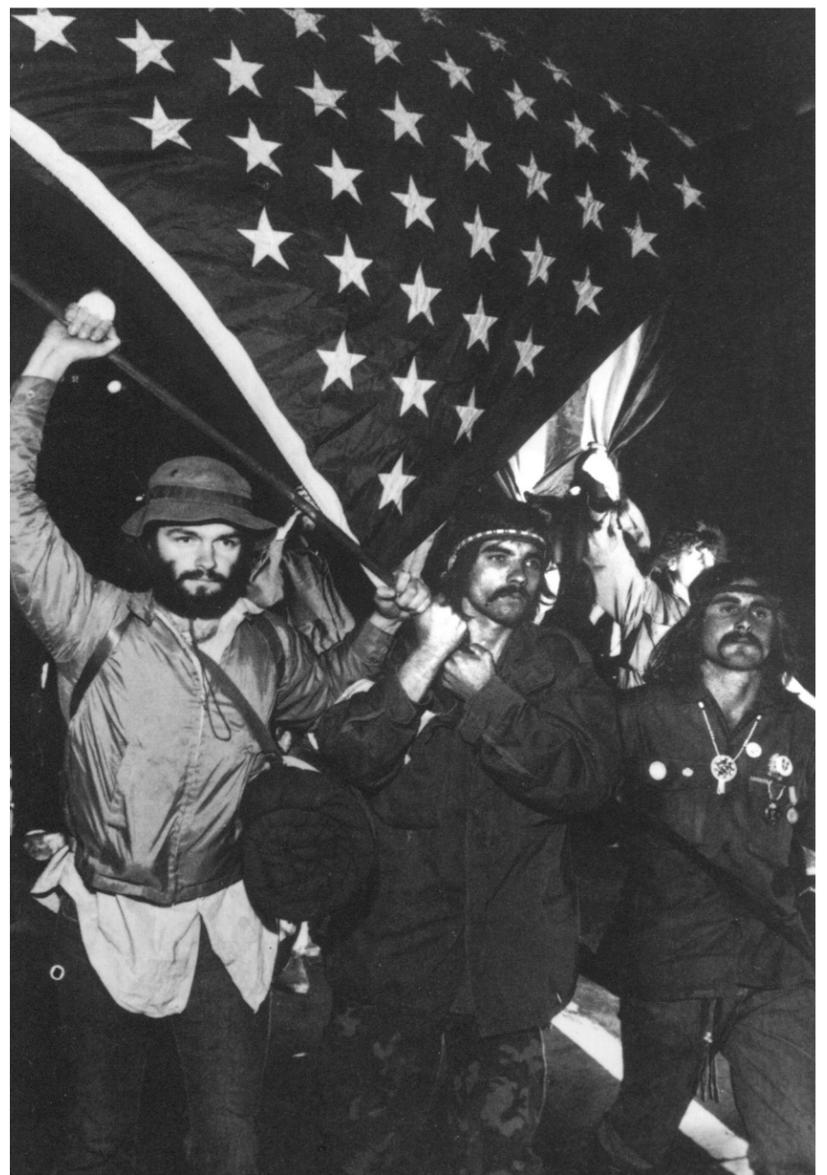
A cold-blooded, battle-trained beast,
A mindless savage ordered to kill,

A molded piece of steel, an object ... a gear,
A very small cog in a far-reaching engine of death,
An insignificant fleck in the overall fabric of life,

A negligible notch on the handle of an enemy's gun,
A mere afterthought for those who extol the wonders of war,
An unkempt grunt,
A lonely, gutted, blood-spattered corpse lying on the ground,
Something like the trivial crush of dead dog on a lonely country road,
Dead meat ... with a tin tag,

A sacred breath of life having been stripped from its mother's womb,
A father's pride ... his very best friend,
Someone whose name is Abdul, Mohammed, Ishmael, Ibrahim, or Hassan,
Or then again ... perhaps even Mike, John, Eddy, Ben, or Bill,
A world diminished by the loss of another precious child!

Doug Soderstrom



Remembering Dave

Most of us knew that Dave Dellinger had been quite ill for some time, but the news of his death this past May still came as quite a shock. We got used to having Dave around, always the conscience of the movement for peace and social justice, always at the forefront of any activity that would expand freedom and equality. Now he is gone, but not from our hearts or our memories, and his fight—our fight—continues.

I first learned of Dave Dellinger around 1966 or 1967, while I was still in the Navy and becoming more and more radicalized by the Vietnam war. I read about him in all the underground newspapers I could find. I recall photographs of him splattered with red paint as he marched for peace and social justice with other movement figures like Staughton Lynd. He seemed awfully brave to me, as I was taking mild amounts of shit for speaking up against the war while in uniform. I admired how willing he was to continue the fight in the face of serious and often very dangerous reaction.

I was in the courtroom in Chicago in 1969, sitting next to Sid Lens, when Dave and the other members of the “Chicago Eight”

were arraigned. Dave stood tall and fearless in the face of this government effort to railroad him and the others into prison for exercising their First Amendment rights.

Nearly twenty years passed before I actually met Dave and got to know him a little better.

In 1988, he was invited to be a guest-in-residence at one of the dorms here at the University of Illinois. I attended as many of the public events as I could, gradually introducing myself to Dave. He was very happy to meet a continuing VVAW member in downstate Illinois, and he had many great things to say about our organization and, in particular, about Barry Romo, with whom he had maintained contact over the years.

Unfortunately, Dave's visit to Champaign-Urbana was cut short that time, as he received word that his son had just passed away from cancer. I still remember the tears in his eyes as he chatted with me on the afternoon of his departure.

After that, Dave returned to Champaign-Urbana a few more times, including two trips with his life-partner Elizabeth Peterson. In these later years, Dave was clearly

more frail, but the spark in his eyes and the fire of his commitment lit up the rooms in which he spoke.

Dave's legacy to the struggle for a nonviolent world is considerable. For us in VVAW, he holds a very special place, as he is remembered for his efforts to bridge the supposed gap between the peace movement and the GIs and veterans during the Vietnam war. In 1966 he wrote:

In a sensible world it would be obvious that there is a natural alliance of sympathy and common interest between the men whose lives and limbs are threatened in a dishonest and unnecessary war and those who are trying to bring that war to an end. It would also be obvious that among those who are exempt (because of age, occupation, sex or other accidental circumstance) it takes more courage, more loyalty to one's fellows who are bearing the brunt of the war, to speak up for peace than to keep conveniently and safely quiet. This does not mean that the peace demonstrators are necessarily right in everything they say or do, but it should be clear that

their motives and character are different than is often suggested by the government and its most narrow-minded supporters.

— From Dellinger's foreword to “In the Teeth of War: Photographic Documentary of the March 26th, 1966, New York City Demonstration against the War in Vietnam”

Nearly forty years later, these words carry weight in the current struggles against war and for social justice. Dave Dellinger lives on in the spirit of these words and in the memories of those who witnessed him in action. We'll miss you, Dave.

Joe Miller

I was lucky to be Dave Dellinger's friend for more than 30 years. I first met him when I moved to New York City to serve in VVAW's National Office — heady times for a young Chicano from San Bernardino, California. There I met this famed pacifist from the Chicago Eight and instantly liked him.

We worked together closely in Miami during the political conventions. He started a hunger strike, and a number of VVAW members joined in. I did too, but didn't last a day.

I am not a pacifist, but he did not try to convert me. Not because I wasn't worth it, but because he led by example instead of preaching.

When I fell into sectarianism, we remained friends. When I fell out of ultra-leftism and apologized, he didn't accept my apology, saying I had nothing to apologize to him for.

I didn't meet his wife Elizabeth until much later, but I can see why he was with this intelligent and sweet woman.

There is a poem from Ho Chi Minh's “Prison Diary” about a signpost and how it isn't big, but it points the way and says how far to go and people will remember it. Dave was a road atlas. He was a hero, and we should remember our heroes.

Barry Romo

Meanwhile in Vietnam



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.

"VVAWAI" is not a faction, caucus or part of VVAW, Inc. They are not affiliated with us in any way. "VVAWAI" 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 _____
 Branch _____
 Dates of Service (if applicable) _____
 Unit _____
 Military Occupation _____
 Rank _____
 Overseas Duty _____
 Dates _____

- Yes, add me to the VVAW email list
- I do not wish to join, but wish to make a donation to the work of VVAW
- Sign me up for a lifetime membership in VVAW. \$250 is enclosed.

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 \$25.00 (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

POW Remembered

RICHARD BOES

I just had to get out of the house. My father was a drunk. Sure, he went to work each day, came home to cocktails and passed out in his easy chair in front of the TV every night. He never said much, yelled some, but mostly just repeated what my mother had to say. It was almost as if he wasn't there. My mother was a nag: overbearing, dominating and asking too many questions. I was the oldest of five children; my mother confided in me once that she would have left my father years ago if it weren't for the kids.

My father never fought in World War II like my friends' dads did. A childhood disease left him with a punctured eardrum and he was classified 4-F. He even wore a goofy bathing cap when we went swimming to keep water from getting in his ear. I just wanted out and knew the military would provide meals, housing and a paycheck. I had to be someone different than my dad. I wanted to be a man. I wanted to be a hero.

I tried joining the Marines, but they said I'd have to wait three months, so I went across the street and enlisted in the Army. Eighteen and two days out of high school I left home. Nine months later I was leaving for Vietnam. My mom didn't want me to go. My dad didn't seem to care one way

or another. When I said goodbye, I shook his hand and never even kissed my mother. As I looked back from the street and waved, she was standing in the doorway, crying.

I was trained as an MP and had been assigned to the First Cavalry. We were on a small base camp on the outskirts of a Vietnamese village. Our POW compound was surrounded by twenty-foot high barbed wire. The prisoners, who never had names, were kept beneath open tents, with bare cots to sleep on. There was a pallet of board under each cot to keep it from sinking into the mud. We as guards had bunkers and empty oil drums, three-fourths of which were sunken into the ground. Fearing rockets and mortars, I spent many nights peering out of that oil drum with my shotgun held on a sleeping prisoner.

Our POW compound was transitory. Prisoners never stayed very long. They were brought in from the field, interrogated for three or four days, and sent to who knows where. We never had more than three or four at a time. I believe most prisoners never made it out of the field; they just kept a few alive to see what, if any, information they could get. Some were turned over to the South Vietnamese Army, and I know of

at least one who was butchered and strung up for days in the village marketplace as an example to the villagers. These smells and images are still with me.

Prisoners were never dressed in more than a pair of filthy boxer shorts, their legs and feet covered with heat sores and blisters, abscessed and oozing. I remember thinking they might not feel too bad about being caught, relieved they didn't have to hump the bush anymore and grateful to get something more than rice to eat. But I only remember one receiving medical attention.

This prisoner, who had a bullet in his leg, was interrogated for three days before being taken to the hospital. I provided an escort. As medevac choppers went, patients were selected in accordance with the severity of their wounds. One GI with his arm in a cast was bumped from the flight because of my prisoner. He got real pissed. "I gotta wait because of a fucking gook bastard? I'll kill the motherfucker!"

I tried to calm him. "He's had a bullet in his leg for three days."

"Fuck him."

"Sorry," I said.

That chopper flight was the worst of my flight experiences, and we weren't even shot at. One of

the passengers was an American soldier who had fallen some fifty feet off a radio tower. He was screaming in pain and cursing at the top of his lungs. His feet were like full-blown blue balloons. That half-hour ride seemed an eternity. I don't remember my prisoner ever making a sound, showing any emotion or any sign of being in pain. Truth is, I saw more GIs killed by accidents, mistakes and "friendly fire" than I did by the enemy. I did get the prisoner to the hospital in one piece despite numerous requests to fuck him up or boot him out the chopper door.

One of my duties was to monitor interrogations, to make sure the Geneva Convention for the treatment of prisoners was upheld — the reality of which was a joke. A South Vietnamese interpreter sat facing the prisoner, right in his face. An American intelligence officer sat behind a small table making notes and looking at maps. He spoke through the interpreter whose translation always seemed much longer and more violent. I stood a few feet off to the side. Prisoners were screamed at, smacked in the face, punched, kicked, spit on, had their

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Coalition Forces Suffer More Than One Thousand Dead

