

THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

50¢

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Mobile to New Orleans: Resistance Defined in Epic Action

WARD REILLY



Veterans leading the march through Mobile

Dave Cline of VVAW and Veterans For Peace called me and a few others back in December and asked what we thought about organizing a march along the Katrina-affected Gulf Coast to commemorate the third anniversary of the war in Iraq, in the mold (no pun intended) of the civil-rights marches of the sixties. We had been tossing around different ideas about what action to take for the third anniversary of the Iraq disaster ever since we had marched together in Washington in September 2005, and it was time to make a decision. The Veterans Gulf March was born. We were "Walkin' to New Orleans"!

Stan Goff took the bull by the horns and started putting together a team to organize this huge undertaking, and in January we got down to business. Goff, a retired Special Forces master sergeant and a member of VVAW, VFP, and Military Families Speak Out, put together a budget and supply list, and we got to work organizing. We set up a website, started a series of conference calls, and formed committees and a task force. The team involved is too large to list,

but they know who they are and what we accomplished together.

Veterans for Peace of Mobile, Alabama (led by Paul Robinson) put out the official call to march. We knew we were already late in organizing an adventure of this scope, but we were determined. It was a great idea to tie the war in Iraq—and its staggering cost—to the virtual abandonment of the Gulf Coast and the city of New Orleans. If the Bush administration had trillions of dollars to destroy and "rebuild" Iraq, why wasn't that same administration doing everything possible to help the destroyed cities in our own country? As the event T-shirts read, "Every bomb dropped on Iraq explodes along the Gulf Coast." This was based on Dr. Martin Luther King's words during the Vietnam War, when he said, "The bombs in Vietnam explode at home; they destroy the hopes and possibilities for a decent America."

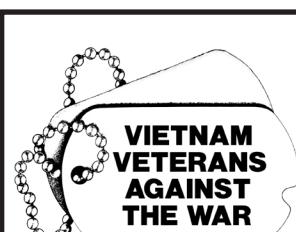
We decided to start the 130-mile march on Tuesday, March 14 and to end the march in New Orleans on March 19, the third anniversary of our nation's invasion

of Iraq, a country that did absolutely nothing to the USA. And we marched, and we rode on buses, and we marched some more. Our message was simple enough: "Let's stop the war and rebuild our own nation *now*." Our logo was designed by Perry O'Brien of IVAW; it showed a combat soldier and a civilian woman walking side by side into the sunset.

Local press coverage was outstanding, with front-page photos and articles in every city we marched through. We were on local television and on many live

radio shows around the country. If there was one disappointment, it was in our national press's failure to cover the march. But the good news is that we got killer international press; *Aljazeera* covered us for the last three days, and the BBC, CNN, and a Japanese press agent were with us. In other words, the people of Iraq and the rest of the world got to see US veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars speaking the truth about those wars, a major coup for us. There

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From the National Office

BARRY ROMO

We keep hearing from the Republicans how noble this war in Iraq is, and how necessary it is for public safety. If it's so noble, why is there no Bush family member serving there—or two, or twenty? How come other people's sons and daughters are supposed to make Iraq safe for democracy? The Bush family are never even asked why their kids and relatives aren't in harm's way.

Hell, Baby Bush even has twins; he could sacrifice one for the cause. If she were killed, they would still have one who looked exactly like the other, so they wouldn't miss her so much. And if she were blown up, they'd have a model for the plastic surgeons to consult while remaking her face.

And hell, Brother Jeb in Florida has a whole passel of kids. Shit! They are taking forty- and fifty-year-olds and drug addicts, so his drug-user daughter could join the Marines; might even make a man out of her. Really, there have got to be thirty or forty in the Bush family alone available for combat.

Along comes Hillary Clinton, hitting Bush from the right on Iran. Well, goddamn it, she's got a daughter too. Don't be a hypocrite, Hillary. Give up your child in time

for the next election.

On a similar note, remember Abu Ghraib? A nineteen-year-old woman—yes, a teenager—dog leash in hand, got blamed for torture. She came back to the good old USA pregnant, and is now in military prison.

Compare her fate with that of a chief warrant officer, an older male (probably a lifer). He tortured to death an Iraqi prisoner of war. He got a letter of reprimand and no jail time, and he's back at work as an interrogator.

Believe what they do, not what they say.

Well, Bush is now down to a 27% approval rating, and the press and Congress act like he's not a lame duck. The problem is that he's in charge, with his finger on the nukes. And he's thinking Iran must be next, because God talks to him. Nixon, at this point in his presidency, was talking to paintings of Lincoln and praying to God, not talking to God. These are dangerous times, as Seymour Hersh points out in the *New Yorker*.

We in VVAW need to ratchet up our visibility in local and national activities. We need to remind people how we were transformed by our war, and show that



Barry Romo and Kathleen Cleaver.

we support Iraq Veterans Against the War in their efforts to organize their brothers and sisters and to make their case with the American people.

Everyone should check out our website (www.vvaw.org) to purchase a copy of the new DVD version of *Winter Soldier*, with all sorts of extras. Also, check your local area for showings of the new documentary about the GI and veteran movement during the Vietnam War, *Sir! No Sir!*

Mark your calendars! VVAW

will be forty next year, and we're planning a big bash in Chicago. You're all invited. This will be a good time with old friends (and new ones); it'll be an event to be remembered. History in the making, history remembered. Watch for further information on our website and in future issues of the *Veteran*.



BARRY ROMO IS A VVAW NATIONAL COORDINATOR AND A MEMBER OF THE CHICAGO CHAPTER.

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 Grant, Marty Webster Jon Bjornson, Ward Reilly, John Zutz, Bill Branson, Claudia Lennhoff, Bill Perry, Dave Kettenhofen, Deborah Harse, Horace Coleman, and others for contributing photos.

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Fraggin'

BILL SHUNAS

We haven't been hearing much "support the troops" rhetoric lately from the politicians and pundits who support the war. Maybe that's because 72% of the troops in Iraq say all the troops should be withdrawn by the end of the year. (That's according to a poll conducted by Zogby.) Also, 26% of the troops thought immediate withdrawal was the best choice. War supporters used to say that antiwar activities undermined troop morale; now the troops are out ahead of the rest of us in opposing the US presence in Iraq.

Now, if nearly three quarters of the troops are in favor of withdrawal, maybe "supporting the troops" means that we should get out of this war ASAP. The chickenhawks can't accept that, so the "support" rhetoric is fading.

Recently Bush said that withdrawal will be up to the next president. That would be consistent with the lack of support these troops have been getting from day one: delayed medical attention early in the war, the lack of Kevlar vests, the lack of armor for Humvees, the lack of gloves for the troops in the Afghan winter. Oh yes, Afghanistan. The latest information from there says that war isn't going well either. As far as I know, no poll has been conducted among those stationed in Afghanistan, but I doubt those troops are too happy with their situation. With the perpetrators of 9/11 long gone, what is their purpose?

In my opinion, the antiwar

movement has not been as active in this war, compared to Vietnam. There are demonstrations each March for the anniversary of the beginning of the war. During the rest of the year, antiwar activity is more subdued. This is not written to diss the antiwar movement. It's a different situation from Vietnam. Back then, we were trying to convince fellow citizens of the bankruptcy of the war; now most

leaders and the situation on the ground in Iraq that undermines morale. Troop morale is not lowered by antiwar activity, whether it is high-intensity activity (as during Vietnam) or what we have today. That brings us back to the point that the best way to support the troops is to bring them home.

In place of the "support the troops" rhetoric, the hawks have lately been switching over to the

Back then, we were trying to convince fellow citizens of the bankruptcy of the war; now most of our fellow citizens have that figured out.

of our fellow citizens have that figured out. Back then, we felt we were part of the democratic process, like we could demand that the nation's leadership change; now it seems like the nation's leadership is oblivious to any kind of pressure. They don't care that these wars have no purpose for those who don't hold oil stock. They don't know that these wars can't be won. They are arrogant and stubborn...and don't forget stupid.

Today's antiwar activity is also less publicized by the media. I make these points to say that those who claim that antiwar activity undermines the morale of the troops are wrong. Morale gets undermined when you fight unjust or unwinnable wars. It is the lying

"those 2,400 cannot have died in vain" mode. My apologies to the families, but those 2,400 have died in vain, and there is no sense in adding to the list. That happened in Vietnam. Long after it was evident that the war was unwinnable, we kept sacrificing troops, claiming that if we didn't keep fighting, it would dishonor those who had previously paid the price. Such rhetoric is only a cover for those who will not admit the war policy was misguided in the first place. It is an effort to shift the guilt for the 2,400 dead.

Then we get to those who claim that the US military "never tucks tail and runs," and "these colors don't run," and other such phrases. Yeah, baby. You guys and gals get up front and fight this

no-win war. We'll support you all the way.

Finally, I must issue an apology. In the past, many of us have been critical of those we have called chickenhawks. This term refers to our nation's leaders who see fit to lead us into various wars, but who, back in the day when they had their chance to serve in a war, found their way out of it.

Ronald Reagan helped fight World War II in the movie studio, but got us involved in a couple of minor wars. Bill Clinton avoided the draft. The current president avoided Vietnam by joining the National Guard, but he wasn't afraid to get us into this mess in Iraq. Most of those who advised him on this adventure were also skilled at avoiding military service.

We used to criticize them for this, but think about it: maybe it's good that they didn't serve. Back in 'Nam, if you were hunkered down in a firefight, would you have wanted Cheney with you? If you were out in the field, guys would be afraid to go off to take a dump, not knowing where Cheney would be aiming on their way back. I can picture a Three Stooges movie where Curly has his finger stuck on the trigger of a machine pistol. So I apologize. If Cheney is an example, I'm glad these chickenhawks never served in the military.



BILL SHUNAS IS A VIETNAM VETERAN AND AUTHOR.

Notes from the Boonies

PAUL WISOVATY

Thompson was always one of my heroes, you know.

He has also been a minor footnote in history. I work with a thirty-six-year-old Marine (there are no ex-Marines) who has never heard of him. My officer's a pretty smart guy, but as I suggested, Hugh Thompson isn't exactly a household name. I would venture to guess that about one in fifty people in Tuscola has any idea who he was, and I don't know whether that percentage would increase if you took a poll walking down a street in New York City. For the uninitiated, here's a quick bio.

My Lai, South Vietnam, March 16, 1968. Thompson and two crew members were helicopterizing over the village, expecting

to draw fire from enemy forces. Instead, they saw several hundred Vietnamese civilians, dead or dying, piled in an irrigation ditch. Putting the chopper down, they came to a quick and accurate conclusion: American soldiers had killed them, and were in the process of finishing off any who were left alive. There was no indication of the presence of enemy forces in the area.

Thompson noticed several children and elderly adults trying to run away. He placed his chopper between the soldiers and the fleeing civilians, and gave an extraordinary order to his crewmates: If the soldiers fire at the civilians, shoot the soldiers. It didn't come to that, but let's push "pause" for a

second. *If the Americans fire at the Vietnamese, shoot the Americans.* I realize that most readers don't work in the court system, but we have a legal phrase for that sort of behavior. It's called having really big brass balls.

Thompson and his crew succeeded in saving the lives of several of the Vietnamese, and he immediately reported the incident to superiors. Predictably, nobody cared. A year later, one of those rascally whistle-blowers did what his caste heroically does, and the rest is history. Of course, one man's history is another man's whitewash. To this day, there are those who think that Lt. "Rusty"

During the twenty years that I've lived in Tuscola, I've penned a few dozen articles for the local paper. I never got paid for any of them, but it would have been nice to have gotten five bucks at least once. I could then have called myself a "professional journalist." So I was obviously flattered when, a couple of years ago, the publisher asked if I'd be interested in doing some work for which I would actually be paid. I was flattered up until the point at which he explained that he needed somebody to write obituaries. It seems that the last obit writer had, I guess fittingly, died. I respectfully declined. As they say, pride goeth before a fall.

But I'd like to do one now. I just hope that I do it justice. Hugh

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My View

JOHN ZUTZ

There are good reasons to classify information. First, it keeps enemies from knowing what we know about their capabilities. Another good reason is that if enemies know that we possess certain information, they may be able to discern our intelligence methods—how we got the info.

There are also bad reasons to classify. One bad reason would be to conceal information to keep someone from looking bad. The “secret” bombing of Laos and Cambodia is an example of this. The North Vietnamese knew, so certainly the Russians and Chinese knew. The Laotians knew, the Cambodians knew, the plane drivers who dropped the bombs knew. The only ones in the dark were US citizens.

This is closely related to another bad reason to classify docu-

ments: to manipulate available information for political purposes. It looks like this is what happened in July 2003, except in this case it was declassification.

Just as the *Veteran* approached the deadline for the 2005 Memorial Day issue, the news broke, big time. I. Lewis (“Scooter”) Libby was instructed by President George W. Bush, through Vice President Dick Cheney, to leak classified intelligence documents related to Iraq.

Special Counsel Patrick Fitzgerald made the revelation in a court filing. He said the leak was the result of a “strong desire to repudiate claims” made by former ambassador Joseph Wilson in a July 2003 newspaper article. In the lead-up to the Iraq invasion, Wilson was hired by the CIA to evaluate whether Iraq

sought to obtain nuclear material from Niger.

The yellowcake accusation was a pivotal point in the assertion that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. That accusation proved to be based on what even newspaper reporters could recognize as a crudely forged document.

Wilson’s article helped debunk the yellowcake accusation. In it, he stated, “Some of the intelligence related to Iraq’s nuclear weapons program was twisted to exaggerate the Iraqi threat.”

This leaves a lot of questions to be answered. Over 2,300 dead boys and girls demand answers. A trillion dollars of debt demands answers. Both sides of the congressional aisle ought to be clamoring to hear the answers.

Was the intelligence “massaged” to reach a foregone conclu-

sion? The Downing Street memo says yes. Why else would any administration believe a forged document from dubious sources over a trusted ambassador? And if the ambassador had no credibility, why attempt to discredit him?

And the big one: Why would anyone believe this leak has no connection to the other leak Fitzgerald is investigating, the leak that illegally exposed Wilson’s wife, Valerie Plame, as a CIA agent?

Scooter was the source of both leaks. Bush and Cheney were the instigators of one. Does anyone believe Scooter acted alone on the other? Yes? I have a bridge I’ll sell you cheap.



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

Notes from the Boonies

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Calley, who was in charge of the Americal Division platoon that day in 1968, was the real hero, viciously scapegoated by the Army. I don’t entirely disagree with the second half of that assessment, although it’ll be a sober day in Dick Cheney’s office before I label Calley a hero. Hugh Thompson, along with his surviving crewmate, Lawrence Colburn, was awarded the Soldier’s Medal on March 6, 1998. I had never heard

of this medal, but I’m told that it’s several notches above my Good Conduct Medal.

I have briefly summarized what happened at My Lai and thereafter, but you know what? I can’t get Mr. Thompson’s order out of my mind. “If the Americans fire at the Vietnamese, shoot the Americans.” If he had just called Calley a son of a bitch and quoted the Geneva Convention, I’d have been impressed. If he had stuffed

a mama-san under his flak jacket and medevaced her out of harm’s way, I’d have given him a medal based on that. But that wasn’t what he did. “If the Americans fire at the Vietnamese, shoot the Americans.” Did this guy have a death wish? Did he consider for a moment what he’d just said, and what might happen in the next thirty seconds? Didn’t he realize he was dealing with a platoon of charged-up, burnt-out, frustrated, scared and pissed-off grunts with loaded M-16s? What the hell was this guy thinking?

I don’t know. I just know what he did. Hugh Thompson died this year, too young and way too unheralded. As an old enlisted man, I guess the best eulogy I can offer is this: It would have been an honor to have served under you, sir.



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

The Ghost Walks!!



Winter Soldier/Wagin' War Minneapolis

BILLY X. CURMANO

These are the times that try men's souls. The summertime soldier and the sunshine patriot will in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. —Thomas Paine

War is the ultimate failure of civilization. It creates a culture of hate, death and destruction that changes its participants forever. The Iraq War, with its atrocities at Abu Ghraib and sites yet to be discovered, is not new. It parallels Vietnam and the ever-expanding history of war and inhumanity. The Vietnam War had Lt. William Calley of Charlie Company and the March 16, 1968 My Lai Massacre. Lt. Calley gave the "search and destroy" order that flattened the village of Son My. The two platoons of Charlie Company were war-torn. They had suffered lots of casualties. If you've never been sent to kill or be killed (quite literally), you wouldn't understand. They were probably on edge, really on edge.

It was more an execution than a firefight. It most likely began as Charlie Company protected themselves with superior fire from what their intelligence said was an enemy stronghold. In war, things have a way of getting out of hand. By some reports, 500 men, women and children—including babies—were killed in a matter

of hours: shot while fleeing; shot in the back; shot while praying. Lt. William Calley became the scapegoat for an administration that claimed My Lai to be an isolated incident.

In response, Vietnam Veterans Against the War gathered over 125 Vietnam veterans for the Winter Soldier Investigation at a Detroit Howard Johnson hotel in February 1971. Three days of testimony exposed the brutality of their tours of duty. Without regard for possible repercussions, the mostly young men bravely testified to witnessing and participating in war crimes. They testified about things that had changed their lives forever. They wanted to awaken America. My Lais and Abu Ghraibs are to be expected in the culture of war.

I remember that Winter Soldier Investigation. I began actively protesting the war in 1969, and I worked with Milwaukee's VVAW in the early days. I wanted to testify, but just couldn't. I couldn't talk about it yet. I served with the 173rd Airborne Brigade in 1968 and '69, in a paratrooper strike force that moved about the country, striking fast and hard, at least theoretically. We marked our path with human skulls and ears. My company had a motto: "Dog Company: a pocketful of ears." The uninitiated may ask why. It was unsaid, but we simply wanted to stay alive. We wanted

the enemy to fear us more than we feared them. We wanted them to think twice about engaging the "Herd."

I repressed much of this with drugs and alcohol (read "PTSD" here) until the Karl Armstrong trial in Madison, Wisconsin several years later. Karl was charged with (among other things) blowing up the Army Math Research Center at the University of Wisconsin. Karl didn't deny the charges. He pled guilty. In this way, attorney William Kunstler, Karl and his defense team used the Winter Soldier model to put the war on trial. I joined with other VVAW witnesses to expose the atrocities that drove Karl and the New Year's Gang to acts of violence against the war machine. My testimony stirred up dark memories. Afterward, I was exhausted. I fled my home and found anonymity on the road. I bring this up only to emphasize how difficult it was to expose the realities of war, and to show my admiration for those "winter soldiers" who broke first ground in Detroit—and the Iraq veterans that have begun to follow.

A film crew captured those first testimonies in the documentary *Winter Soldier*; with footage every bit as relevant today as it was thirty years ago. First released by Winterfilm in 1972, it played to accolades in Europe, but was repressed in the USA. Milestone Films rereleased it in 2005 to an

ever-expanding university and art-house audience. One reviewer noted that it still possessed "the power of an unexploded grenade."

Last January, I was asked to represent VVAW and perform the song/poem "Wagin' War" at the Bryant Lake Bowl *Winter Soldier* screening in Minneapolis, as part of the City Pages documentary film festival. The audience spanned generations of witnesses to the repeated cycles of war. VVAW shared an information table with Veterans for Peace. A veteran VVAW campaign banner and traveling display with documentation from thirty-some years of our antiwar and social-justice struggle stood as reminders of vigilance. Several harrowing photographs smuggled out of Vietnam in 1969 showed the work of my unit, personalized the film's message, and brought it all home.



BILLY X. CURMANO SERVED WITH THE 173RD AIRBORNE BRIGADE (D CO., 4TH BATTALION 503RD INFANTRY) IN VIETNAM DURING 1968–69 AND RECEIVED A PURPLE HEART AND OTHER COMMENDATIONS FOR HIS TROUBLES. HE JOINED WITH ANTIWAR VETS TO DEMAND THE WAR'S END SHORTLY AFTER, AND CONTINUES WORKING WITH VVAW AS A MINN. CONTACT. MORE INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE AT WWW.BILLYCURMANO.COM.

Wagin' War

Busy, boyish hands flying air-conditioned cockpits,
Playing Dungeons and Dragons and delighting in direct hits,
High above reality and anguished human cries,
Separated by Ninja Turtle Nintendo screens blocking out the whys.
But then again, bloody bull's-eyes wins extra tries.

Patriotic rites of passage push and pull us straight to hell.
High-hoped heroes exchanging emotions
For protective plastic shells—
Can you look them in the eye again?
Can you pat them on the back
When they kill for you...believe in you...
believe in where you're at?
Take your AWACS and A-10 and A this 'n' that—
Take your AWACS and A-10 and shove it up your...!

Well, I read about a baby
That was wounded by a bullet
That was meant for her...mama!

The young soldier that shot her had nothing against her.

While! We keep wagin' war.
While! We keep wagin' war.

Well, I read about a baby
That was wounded by a bullet
That was meant for her...mama!

The young soldier that shot her had nothing against her.

When! We were wagin' war.
When! We were wagin' war. (Refrain)

But mama was a rebel, so she would have to die.
"Just followin' orders," the young soldier sighed
As he squeezed on the trigger and let the round fly.
Though she believed in truths just as strongly as he,
Their personal Napoleons could never agree.
He might've asked why. But then again, foreign tongues have a tendency
To tie.

War-fueled adrenaline junkies and jock-ass news reporters,
Mr. and Ms. taking missiles and tracers and rockets and mortars
For Fourth o' July fireflies that light up the skies,
While bombastic bomb blasts blow out their eyes.
And the damaged eye always wonders why.

VVAW Growing in Cincinnati

MARTY WEBSTER

Since I became the VVAW contact for Cincinnati, a lot of exciting things have happened. Our first VVAW event was on November 19 and 20, when we joined VVAW contact Mark Hartford and the Columbus, Ohio VVAW for two showings of *Winter Soldier* at Ohio State University's Wexner Center for the Arts. The events were well attended, and discussions followed each showing. Members of Veterans for Peace and Military Families Speak Out also participated.

In January, we attended a memorial and interment service for Specialist Douglas Barber near Cincinnati. He was an Iraq veteran who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and because of the ongoing failure of the VA to adequately address his issues, he was no longer able to cope. Tragically, he took his own life on January 16 in Alabama.

On February 4, we were invited to set up a table and say a few words at a "Day of Dialogue on Iraq" by Reverend Benjamin J. Urmston, director of the Xavier University peace and justice programs. The event was a dialogue between Adeed I. Dawisha, a professor of political science at Miami University (Ohio) and Ray McGovern, an Army officer and CIA analyst. Dawisha represented the point of view that the United States must stay in Iraq until Iraq is able to protect itself. McGovern

argued that by invading Iraq, the United States launched a war of aggression (defined by Nuremberg as "the supreme international crime"), and said that troops must be withdrawn immediately.

On Presidents' Day, we participated in a "constitutional vigil" in front of the Federal Building in Cincinnati. This was part of a series of events organized by MoveOn to bear witness to the president's lawbreaking and increase the pressure on Congress to do something about it.

In March, we set up a table outside the Tangeman University Center at the University of Cincinnati during a presentation by retired general Wesley Clark on national security and veterans' issues. The Hamilton County Democratic Party sponsored the event. Later in March, we were invited to participate in a discussion on a veterans' outreach program at a luncheon in Louisville.

From April 7 to 13, VVAW participated in ten showings of *Winter Soldier* at the University of Cincinnati, which were sponsored by the Cincinnati Film Society. We had only two days' advance notice to prepare, and attendance was sparse for the first few showings. However, word of mouth about the film spread quickly. The attendees were riveted as they viewed the eyewitnesses' testimony on war crimes and atrocities. The film evokes all of the sorrow and

pain that Vietnam has come to represent.

Because of intense student interest and the interest of Steve Sunderland (a UC peace studies professor and the director of the Peace Village), VVAW has been invited to sponsor a two-day showing of *Winter Soldier* in May. Robert Harris (community relations co-coordinator for the National Conference for Community and Justice of Greater Cincinnati) and Stewart Newstate (a retired investigator for the Ohio Civil Rights Commission) have agreed to help with the publicity and arrangements.

I moderated and gave a brief synopsis of the *Winter Soldier* investigation and the background of the film. The documentary not only exposes war crimes, but it also gives us an insight into the effects of PTSD on Vietnam veterans, and I spoke about Douglas Barber's funeral, noting that Iraq war veterans also experience PTSD. Discussions followed each session. "I know this girl, and she just signed up, and she really wants to change her mind," said one fellow.

"So many of my buddies are coming back, and they are different," added another. "I don't quite understand it; they don't seem to want to talk about it."

I spoke about how war changes us, usually with long-lasting effects. I explained to the group

how VVAW was in the forefront in getting our government and the VA to recognize the seriousness of PTSD in returning veterans, and said that sometimes symptoms don't appear until years later.

One evening after the theater had been locked, the custodian heard the conversation and said he had done six years in the Army. "This isn't about 1972; it's about 2006," he added.

VVAW has also attended and participated in various candlelight peace vigils and demonstrations in the Ohio Valley area. There is much interest in rejuvenating the VVAW presence in Cincinnati. I am officially announcing the Ohio Valley regional chapter of VVAW. This will cover southern Ohio and parts of Kentucky and southern Indiana, and we hope groups will form new chapters in these areas.



MARTY WEBSTER IS A VIETNAM-ERA VETERAN WHO SERVED IN A NAVAL HOSPITAL DURING THE WAR. HE EXPERIENCED THE RESULTS OF WAR FIRSTHAND FROM A MEDICAL PERSPECTIVE, TREATING YOUNG MEN WHO CAME BACK FROM VIETNAM WITH FACIAL WOUNDS AND BURNS. MARTY ALSO WORKED WITH TDRLS AND MEDEVACS AND ON ESCORT DUTY. LIKE COUNTLESS OTHERS, HE SUFFERS FROM POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER. MARTY IS THE VVAW REGIONAL CONTACT FOR CINCINNATI, OHIO.



VVAW member Jerry Smith (l) and VVAW Cincinnati contact Marty Webster (r) display a new banner funded by a VVAW grant

Veterans Day in Chicago

KEN NIELSEN

For over twenty years, Vietnam Veterans Against the War in Chicago have paid respect to their brothers and sisters on Veterans Day by speaking out against war and imperialism, speaking up for veterans and active-duty soldiers and reminding the general population that war is the worst possible option in any circumstances.

This event was held at various locations in the city over the years until 1982, when Mayor Jane Byrne and Cardinal Bernardin dedicated the first Vietnam War memorial in the country, at the intersection of Wacker and Wabash. The memorial contained a time capsule that listed all of the names of soldiers from Chicago who died in Vietnam. From that day forward, VVAW's ceremony was fittingly conducted at the memorial; that is, until the current mayor, Rich Daley, decided to reconstruct Wacker Drive in 1998 and proceeded to lose the nation's first Vietnam War memorial. Despite all of the city's excuses, let's just recall that Jane Byrne's name was on the memorial, not Daley's. The mayor's solution to this small reminder of his family's short lapse of control over Chicago was to destroy an important and historically significant memorial, and then build his own. In the words of Barry Romo, "Not only was this city the first city to have a city memorial to Vietnam vets, we were also the first city in the world to lose a memorial."

Veterans Day, November 11, 2005 saw the dedication of the city's new Vietnam War memorial, located nearly underground, steps away from one of the state's dirtiest rivers, and almost completely hidden to anyone not taking a vomit-inducing boat tour. It's a nice memorial; there's grass, and a new fountain. But the whole thing has been treated just like veterans in this country: kept out of sight and out of mind. Except, of course, for the dedication. That was where the mayor got to show off his fellow war supporters, busking in Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legionnaires from the suburbs to stock his event.

During the five years the city was hard at work locating the original Vietnam War memorial, VVAW held their ceremony at eleven AM across the street from where the original memorial had been, which just happened to be up a flight of stairs from Daley

and his new war memorial. Having secured a permit to hold the ceremony at that time and that place nearly a year before Veterans Day, VVAW, due to the proximity to the new memorial and the dedication, was forced to stand down by Chicago's finest until Daley's machine was done with its speeches, which reshaped history (the United States won the war in Vietnam?) and blindly supported the current war in Iraq.

Luckily, the city's exercise in senility didn't last long, and VVAW, along with a couple hundred others, began their ceremony. The first speaker was Cody Camacho, an Iraq War veteran who served with the 41st Field Artillery and the 72nd MP Company at the Abu Ghraib prison from March 2003 to March 2004. After giving a firsthand confirmation of the torture that occurred at Abu Ghraib, Cody described some of the problems he faces after returning from the war. "You can't get back. The nightmares, the shakes, the hollow feeling of a soul that's dry for what seems like no reason at all. The recruiter never said that I wouldn't be able to look my mom in the eye when it was over." Cody called for support for returning veterans and thanked veterans of previous wars for helping him and others muster the courage it takes to oppose the war.

Another Iraq War veteran, Dave Adams, who served with the 101st Airborne Division in 2003, spoke of an incident in which his convoy ran down a small child in the streets of Al Khut and was not able to stop to assist the child, due to their orders. After having been told that his mission was "to win the hearts and minds" of Iraqis, Dave struggled to make sense of this incident, and it became one of the many contradictions he witnessed in Iraq that helped shape his current feelings about the war. Dave went on to issue a challenge: "We have to go home and engage our neighbors, our family, our friends. We have to call our representatives and ask for change, demand change. Ask them what they're doing to stop this war now."

Other speakers at the ceremony were VVAW's GI counselor, Ray Parrish, who talked about the sorry state of GI benefits in Illinois; Dr. David Gill, a Democratic candidate for Congress in Illinois, an emergency-room doctor who has



Pat Vogel of MFSO, Veterans Day 2005, Chicago

consistently spoke out against the war in Iraq; Nick Egnatz, a VVAW member from Indiana, who spoke about his trip to DC and lobbying with Cindy Sheehan; and Cesar Ruvalcaba, a veteran who served with the 10th Mountain Division in Somalia, who shared his experiences returning home from the Army with physical disabilities and spoke of his battle to gain compensation for his active-duty-related injuries. The military's practice of preying on minorities and those of low income to fill their ranks, he said, is a modern form of slavery.

VVAW national coordinator Barry Romo was the moderator of the ceremony. He started the day's events by providing historical details about the original Vietnam War memorial, as outlined earlier. Barry added, "Six months to two years to get your first visit [at the VA]? People coming back from Iraq can't wait; they'll be dead, they'll be alcoholics, they'll be doing drugs—anything to get to sleep. The money for the VA should set be in stone. It should not be discretionary."

The event's final speaker was Pat Vogel of Military Families Speak Out. Pat posed a number of excellent questions aimed at those who praise the troops and support the war. "If we feel this way about these people [the troops], why are

we betraying them so badly? Why are we sending them off to war, a war based on lies? Why are we treating them as pawns? And especially, why are we leaving them in a no-win situation with absolutely no end-point in sight?"

The ceremony concluded as the crowd silently placed flowers on a nearby monument and paused to reflect on the day's events, on veterans, and on all of the soldiers who have fallen.



KEN NIELSEN SERVED IN THE US ARMY FROM 1991 TO 1993 (4TH BATTALION, 9TH INFANTRY, 1ST DIVISION). HE IS A MEMBER OF THE CHICAGO CHAPTER OF VVAW.



Ray Parrish, Veterans Day 2005, Chicago

Agent Orange Justice Tour

P. STEWALL

In 1973, the Nixon administration promised \$3 billion in reconstruction aid to Vietnam—you know, to make amends for all the previous years of aid we'd been providing. We shouldn't have to be reminded of past promises to Native Americans to be able to make a wild guess at how much aid has been given to Vietnam to date. That's right: none.

Vietnamese citizens who suffer from Agent Orange poisoning are taking their case to the courts and to compassionate Americans. A delegation of four Vietnamese citizens toured the USA last November and December to garner support for their cause, arriving in Chicago on November 30.

Eighty people braved a cold and blustery evening to arrive at Roosevelt University in downtown Chicago. Local folksinger Anna Stange warmed up the crowd with some topical songs of peace and remembrance. The event was sponsored by the Mansfield Institute for Social Justice. Its director, Heather Dalmage, welcomed the group and introduced the evening's master of ceremonies, Bill Davis, a member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Davis spoke briefly of his experiences in Vietnam, then introduced the speakers, beginning with the tour's national coordinator, Merle Ratner.

The Vietnamese delega-

tion included Dang Thi Hong Nhut, a woman from Ho Chi Minh City who experienced multiple miscarriages between 1973 and 1980 after exposure to Agent Orange around May 1965; Ho Sy Hai, an army truck driver from Thai Binh who suffers from chronic hepatitis, a gastroduodenal ulcer, enterocolitis, and enlargement of the prostate as a result of his exposure in Atopo and Quang Tri between 1965 and 1973; Dr. Nguyen Trong Nhan, not an Agent Orange victim, but a former president of the Vietnam Red Cross, who led the delegation and represented the Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin; and Vu Binh, the delegation's translator, from the Vietnam Union of Friendship Association. (The US government denied a visa to Nguyen Muoi, the son of a veteran of the ARVN.)

Dang told stories of being a member of the long-haired army, Ho reported traveling through recently defoliated areas, and Nguyen explained the effects of dioxin, giving a scientific and well-rounded account of the long-lasting effects of chemical weapons on humans. The depleted uranium



now being used by the United States was also mentioned.

All were very well-spoken, friendly, and patient, and they presented their personal stories to a riveted crowd. Some Vietnam veterans shared their experiences, but otherwise it was quite a diverse audience, including college students, activists, and the simply curious.

The next day, the tour members gave their presentation to two separate classes of local high-school students and teachers. US Army veteran Steve Nelson, who served two years in Vietnam, joined the speakers to relate his experiences from "our side" of the conflict. The students

were very interested and asked some thoughtful questions in the question-and-answer session following the presentations. Snow began to cover the city during the school presentation, and our Vietnamese guests were excited to see the snow fall—more so than their Chicago hosts.

For more information about the Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign, visit www.vn-agentorange.org or email info@vn-agentorange.org.



P. STEWALL IS A MEMBER OF THE CHICAGO CHAPTER OF VVAW.



Cody Camacho of IVAW, Veterans Day 2005, Chicago

Iraq Veteran Speaks Out at the U of I

JEN TAYABJI

On February 11, 2006, the Progressive Resource/Action Cooperative (PRC) hosted an antiwar event featuring Iraq War veteran Dave Adams. The PRC is a multi-issue, multi-tactical activist organization composed of students and community members at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The PRC has been involved in anti-war organizing, including fighting for the rights of GIs and veterans, since the first Gulf War.

Over fifty people came out to hear Adams, a member of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW), discuss his experiences serving in Iraq and readjusting to civilian life. Adams has spoken at many events, including the VVAW Veterans Day rally in Chicago last fall.

Adams joined the military in December 1999, not long after completing high school, and served from 2000 to 2003. He completed basic training at Ft. Jackson, South Carolina. Upon completion of basic training, he was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division at Ft. Campbell, Kentucky. He served as a mechanic for the military police and was stop-lossed in early 2003, shortly before the start of the Iraq War.

During his talk, he described how he was assigned to various tasks and positions, including chaplain's assistant, that he was never trained to do. He spent some time working in convoys, and witnessed a severe shortage of armor in his unit. Because of this lack of armor and the way they were arranged, the convoys were very dangerous, not only the soldiers in the convoy, but also to Iraqi civilians.

Adams called on President Bush to apologize to the troops for lying about the reasons for going to war with Iraq. As part of his process of reintegrating into civilian life, he began to realize that his friends were dying and there wasn't a good justification for what was going on. Adams discussed his work with IVAW and their goals of working to bring the troops home now, support Iraqi reconstruction in any way possible, and support our veterans and our troops now and upon their return home.

Adams said that upon returning home, he began drinking heavily and acting uncharacteristically, and sometimes he became angry for no reason. He went to the lo-



cal VA and was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. He also joined Iraq Veterans Against the War and began speaking out about his experiences. Adams described how the VA's treatment was simply to dole out medication, which had negative side effects and didn't address the problems at hand. It was his work with IVAW that helped him the most. Currently Adams is an undergraduate at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. Despite

being a full-time student, Adams continues fighting for the rights of his brothers and sisters by talking to those who are contemplating enlisting, by talking with his fellow vets, and by speaking out and fighting for the rights of all veterans.



JEN TAYABJI IS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE ILLINOIS DISCIPLES FOUNDATION IN CHAMPAIGN, ILLINOIS.

Three-Day Antiwar Blitz in Baton Rouge

WARD REILLY

On the three-day weekend of February 11–14, 2006, Cindy Sheehan and Ann Wright were the guests of Baton Rouge's Coalition Against War and Injustice for a flurry of antiwar actions. Sheehan and Wright arrived Saturday and got to meet and mingle with about forty members of Southern Louisiana's antiwar community at a barbecue and potluck held at my home to kick off the weekend's events.

On Sunday, Cindy and Ann spoke and answered questions at the Unitarian Universalist church in the morning. The spectacular third annual Candlelight Vigil for the Dead, also at the church that evening, was covered by several media outlets, including ABC-TV (on the ten o'clock news) and the *Advocate*, Baton Rouge's newspaper, which carried a large photo of the vigil on the front page.

Monday started with Cindy and Ann live on WRKF-FM radio for a one-hour statewide call-in show. After the Jim Engster show, we jumped into the van and hurried over to the studio of CBS-TV,

where Cindy did a tape-delayed piece for the noon show.

Following the CBS show, Cindy was joined by Colonel David Couvillion at Louisiana State University in an open discussion on Iraq sponsored by the Bienville House Center for Peace and Justice and the LSU English department. Colonel Couvillion represented the pro-war side, while Sheehan stood in opposition to the occupation of Iraq. Couvillion had been in the initial invasion as a National Guard infantry officer, and was later a provincial governor of one of Iraq's southern provinces. The media were also in attendance for the forum, and our action made the front page of the *Advocate*, local TV, and the LSU newspaper. (LSU's nickname is "The Ole War Skule," primarily because General William T. Sherman was their first president, after the Civil War.)

All in all, it was a banner weekend for the Baton Rouge antiwar community, and we are most thankful for all of those

who helped organize and worked to make this another successful weekend of activism.

The candlelight vigil unquestionably took the most amount of work, and the elaborate labyrinth was laid out over two weekends. 2,267 candles were lit, one for each American killed in action, along with a large cluster to represent the 150,000+ Iraqis killed during our invasion of their nation. The design was laid out by Maida Owens, and dozens of people worked for many hours to prepare the thousands of candles, which were put in cups with sand to hold them in place.

Three hundred citizens from around Southern Louisiana attended this year's candlelight vigil, up from one hundred and fifty last year, a sure sign that our citizens are becoming more and more disgusted with the neocons' "war on terror," which has done nothing but create more reasons for the Islamic world to hate our nation.

The names of the fifty-one

Louisiana troops that have died in Iraq were read by VVAW and Veterans for Peace members Pat Dooley (Army, cavalry, 1968–69), David Collins (Army, combat medic, 1969–70), Mark Ruter (Air Force, Desert Storm, 1986–92) Randy Sinclair (Navy, 1976), and myself (Army, infantry, 1971–74) for the third straight year, a depressing and tearful task for those of us who have opposed the war since before it started.

The vigil is held to commemorate the worldwide demonstration that took place on February 15, 2003, when an estimated 10,000,000 citizens from scores of nations around the world marched in unison to try to prevent the USA from invading Iraq. It should be noted that 82% of the Iraqi people polled want the USA out now, a fact that even the pro-war colonel acknowledged during the debate at LSU.

May this be our last Vigil for the Dead here in Baton Rouge.

WARD REILLY IS THE SOUTHEAST NATIONAL CONTACT FOR VVAW.

The Future of Struggle

BROOKE ANDERSON

On December 4, 2005 I arrived at the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, just a few blocks away from my new home in Oakland, California, to see Barry Romo on a panel convened by AK Press and KPFA. Having recently moved from Champaign, Illinois and missing my friends, I reveled in the idea of Barry and VVAW coming to Oakland, even if only for the evening.

The panel was called "The Future of Struggle: Movement Veterans Discuss Yesterday's Lessons for Today." The idea was to have key figures from various radical movements discuss lessons learned over the last four decades of organizing, how these lessons could be applied to work being done today, and how to move forward.

In addition to Barry Romo, the panel featured Kathleen Cleaver (Black Panther Party), Russell Means (American Indian Movement), Mike James (SDS and Rising Up Angry), Elizabeth Martinez (Chicana activist and author), Ward Churchill (American Indian Movement), Bo Brown (George Jackson Brigade) and a former member of I Wor Kuen. Since I know him so well, sometimes I forget what a movement celebrity Barry really is, but after seeing him in this impressive crowd, I won't forget again!

The panel opened with a lightning round of obligatory introductions: name, organization, and lessons learned. Barry opened by saying, "I never thought that there would be a war worse than Vietnam, but this [the war in Iraq]

is worse. These vets have to worry about going back. Today, we are working with these younger vets. We didn't think that we would make it to thirty years old, let alone form an organization that is now almost forty years old."

During the introductions, Ward Churchill also mentioned VVAW in his remarks, saluting the organization for standing in solidarity with AIM. "VVAW was at Wounded Knee with us, and it is in large part because of VVAW that our lives were saved."

After introductions, the first four questions from the panel and audience were directed at Barry. Kathleen Cleaver opened the questions by asking Barry to talk more about VVAW, saying, "I want more people to know about VVAW. I've always been very impressed with their clarity of views. VVAW's statement on Iraq was literally the only coherent statement I saw."

Then Elizabeth Martinez asked Barry to speak about counter-recruitment. Barry responded, "We get into high schools, even with a name like Vietnam Veterans Against the War. And we were recently on the *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* talking about the education we do in high schools."

When an audience member asked if they should feel ill will toward the soldiers currently in Iraq, Barry responded, "The people in the military are not your enemies. Some of them are. They tend to wear four stars. They tend to work in the Pentagon and send poor kids to war who only dreamed of buying a home for their parents."

Ward Churchill added, "VVAW did these silent marches. All you could hear were boots hitting the street. Once a Republican woman came up to us and said, 'What are you doing to the morale of the troops?' And VVAW would say, 'Lady, we are the troops.'"

Mike James asked Barry to speak about what work is happening today with soldiers still in Iraq and recently returned veterans of the Iraq War. Barry talked about the formation of Iraq Veterans Against the War and the support that VVAW is giving to them. He encouraged people to connect with Iraq veterans and welcome them into the antiwar movement. "People didn't spit on me when I came back and was doing my drugs and alcohol. They told me that the war was wrong, which I knew in my heart, but I couldn't say it yet. But you gotta stay connected to who you once were, and to where other people are at right now. People shouldn't have to learn your language to talk to you. As Dave Dellinger used to say, as a movement, we have to be like an escalator that brings people along with us, not an elevator of activists that leaves the people behind."

When asked his advice for the younger generation thinking about organizing, Barry responded, "Organizing doesn't mean that you have to give up your life, a family, or friends. Because we live here, and not other places where there is more repression if you speak out, we have a responsibility to act. But I also know that you have to have a good time doing it. If some really boring person comes

up to you and doesn't know how to party, I want you to walk away really fast. In Vietnam, I thought that I would never have friends like my platoon mates. But now I do. The movement will give you friends for life." I was reminded how right he was; I consider my VVAW friends and other movement friends to be my friends for life.

Over the years, I've been to a lot of events in the activist community that featured movement veterans reflecting on their experiences. And I've sat bristling at too many of them, who lament the supposed apathy on the part of my generation and generations coming up after us. That's not true—there's a vibrant movement among today's young folks. And if it were true, what would that say about the movement they helped build, one that didn't move young folks up through its ranks?

As I listened to Barry speak that night, I thought about the title of the panel, "The Future of Struggle." VVAW is the future of the struggle, because of the next generation of organizers it has trained, recruited, and found places for in the movement; but also because VVAW continues to do work that is on the very cutting edge of building an antiwar America.



BROOKE ANDERSON IS A VVAW MEMBER AND LEAD ORGANIZER FOR THE EAST BAY ALLIANCE FOR A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY IN OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA.



Doofus about Darfur and Genocide

HORACE COLEMAN

Genocide is a word that mellows out and makes antiseptic and acceptable one of humanity's old habits. The current theater where genocide is playing is on the stage called Darfur, in a country called Sudan.

The first genocide I became aware of was the one America waged against Native Americans. We don't think often about the effects of westward expansion, the Indian Wars, or reservations. Or we justify them.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs continues to mismanage Indian money and land. The circum-

stances of the indigenous people who stubbornly continue to exist don't often enter our thoughts. We think of them—if we do at all—mostly as brand names and place names. They're the names of mascots and athletic teams, or exotic and distant historic customs and individuals.

All it takes for genocide (a special form of extremely vicious war) to occur is:

- Someone who wants it done (just about anyone who can influence, persuade or convince large groups of people to do what they're

already willing and wanting to do)

- People to approve of or accept doing it (finding or inventing needs, scapegoats, grievances; it helps to frame it as an easy way to "solve" problems and unease or to divert attention from what's really bothering people)
- A reason that justifies doing it (almost any excuse will do)
- Someone to do it to, and a way to do it
- Someone to not care about, not know about, condone, or ignore it
- Someone to not intervene, or to

act weakly or too late
And that's how you get the Armenian genocide, the Holocaust, Biafra, Bosnia/Kosovo, Rwanda, and Chechnya, just to name a few randomly selected occurrences.

Darfur, for instance, is a struggle and dispute over natural resources, autonomy, and ethnic politics; it's nomads versus farmers, rebels versus an established government, climate changes, buttinskis from neighboring or distant countries. Hence we get:

Doofus about Darfur or "It all depends on who has the power this hour!"

Sad babies' eyes fill with flies.
Their bellies blimp when
mothers' breasts go flat and limp.

The janjaweed, filling a need, ramble sand gardens
and see that young girls and women
searching for water and wood are well raped.

The African men of these African women mostly
fight, flee, and die by (stubborn rebels)
Arab blades, bullets, and bombs.

Outgunned browns and blacks succumb
(germs, oil drums, starvation, polluting politics)
to a government counting its cash.

The USA gives orders—but can't control its own borders.
Soldiers from the Un-united Nations (African branch)
bake in the sun and watch the fun.

The war and unrest spread genocidal threads
of sorrows that throttle or subside, but never settle.
History is no mystery.

We've done this so long, it's hard to get it wrong.
From time to time, acts produce crimes
that have reasons, but no rhymes. Except

People often need blood and bones
to grow and feed a justification for a deed;
it could be a clash of greed, creed, class, caste, or
what we mistakenly call "race" that opens
the season for getting in someone's face and snarling,
"I want what you got!" (Or, "You stole what I have!")
"So you're gonna get it!"

Human beings tend to forget that we're animals too (although divinely made so and placed at the top of the food chain, some say). Or we may have stopped, or at least paused in, evolving. Or perhaps we were fixed in capability and capacity at the beginning. We have the ability to pleasantly describe, define, or explain (ratio-

nalize) our motivations, needs, and actions. We tend to find it easy to accept—or overlook—the causes of our periodic beastliness.

Because it's "natural" or "historic," it's "inevitable." So the species doesn't need to change its ways. Time and change move like glaciers (minus the global warming).

Genocide is something we do because we can, even if it occasionally shames segments of the human species (a little, for a while). But we still manage to do it. *Sic semper?* Higher priorities?

But why are there Holocaust deniers and people who try to dismiss, repress, or ignore the genocide they caused or partici-

pated in? You'd think they'd be openly proud. Something, somewhere deep inside us, gets uneasy. Perhaps some of us—slightly and slowly, in a slight flicker—don't like what's happened. What's happening still.

*HORACE COLEMAN IS A VETERAN,
POET AND WRITER. HE IS ALSO A
VVAW CONTACT IN CALIFORNIA.*



Candlelight Vigil for the Dead in Baton Rouge, September 12, 2005

Camouflaged Blues

RAY PARRISH

The war's not "over" for our vets until it's over in reality. Stress and anxiety are disabling American veterans of today's perpetual war of terror at a rate this country has never seen. That's because they are behaving as if they are still at war. And they are, in many ways. The nightmares and flashbacks remind them daily of the reality of their own personal war. They have an overwhelming anxiety that they will get called back to war involuntarily. They can only see a future of "victory or death." And they *cannot* change their beliefs or behavior until this war is over! What can we do to help them?

Remember Vietnam? While that war was still going on, VVAW and our supporters provided each other with "political therapy" through marches, rallies, speeches

in schools, etc. A vital part of that experience was the veterans' "rap group." These are again springing up, I hear, especially at meetings of young vets and families and through www.Vets4Vets.us. Since taking action is usually more therapeutic than talking about it, the rap groups provide increasing numbers of volunteers and members to peace and justice groups, as well as giving the vets back their lives and returning them (at long last) to society.

Although post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has been inexpertly covered (or is it covered up?) by the mainstream media, some vets don't take the time to get very far into the "post" part of their lives. Their behavior degenerates almost immediately upon discharge, if not before.

Many vets also have other stress, anxiety and depression symptoms and diagnoses. The catch-22 is that we know that if PTSD symptoms are left untreated for six months, the statistical chance of complete recovery drops below 50%—and it usually takes six months for PTSD symptoms to become obvious. They need help immediately, whether they know it or not!

And there is help out there! It is reported to me that vets and families get volunteer civilian psychological help by the second phone request for it. Don't hesitate to ask, and our fellow Americans will answer this call. There is hope at the end of this tragedy.

The first in a series of articles focusing on grassroots counseling for PTSD and helping with VA claims will begin in the next issue

of the *Veteran*. I need your help. There are many PTSD issues to deal with; group and individual counseling, self-help books, getting treatment, and proving a diagnosis or trauma to the VA are some. I want to start with the topic of outreach: How do I get my vet to ask for help? Tell me of your experiences and send suggestions for topics that you wish me to address. Please email me at camiblue@vvaaw.org or ask the national office to forward your letter to me.



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

*IF YOU NEED HELP, CALL HIM AT
(773) 561-VVAW OR EMAIL HIM AT
CAMIBLUE@VVAW.ORG.*

Veteran Respect

CESAR RUVALCABA

I was one of many veterans that were present with families at Saturday's march [to mark three years in Iraq, with no end in sight —Ed.] on Michigan Avenue. On our way to the staging area on Walton and State, Barry Romo and I encountered a woman in a cab who saw us and screamed out, "Assholes!"

In response to her insult, I replied, "We are not assholes; we are veterans." This is the general situation for people like Barry and myself. Even though we defended our country, we are not treated as people of respect. We are called assholes.

This happened at the start of the march, and I wondered if it was a sign of the sentiment regarding the march and the veterans who had experienced the violence of war firsthand and were now advocating peace. This sentiment was confirmed as we crossed Wacker Drive, heading toward Wabash.

One of the veterans, a long-time member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War, turned to me and said, "Hey, Cesar, look: there is the veteran memorial site." He pointed down toward the river, where the memorial now stood.

Out of over 7,000 marchers that night, I wondered how many people knew that the memorial (honoring veterans from World War II to the present Iraq war) was actually down by the river, out of public sight. It saddens me that the site chosen for the memorial was

away from public view.

What message does this send from our leadership to the veterans that fought these wars, and to the families that were left with a loss of a father, brother, sister, son, or daughter? What message is the city sending when they have men dressed in black with heavy armor and SWAT inscribed on their chests at the start of the march and at the end of the march? All this armor for a group of veterans and civilians that are advocating peace?

Veterans do not need to be recognized as "assholes" or as people who merit a SWAT team when they publicly express their views. We need to be recognized and respected for what we are: ordinary people who were put in extraordinary circumstances and did the best they could to make their country proud. If we advocate peace, we are not stirring up trouble; we are simply expressing our feelings from firsthand experience of being on the front line.

It needs to start with leadership. The mayor needs to be one of the first to recognize this, instead of moving our memorial to below street level. Do not call us assholes; let us express ourselves regarding our experiences and regarding peace. Show us the acknowledgment and respect that we have earned through our service and courage.

CESAR RUVALCABA IS A MEMBER OF THE CHICAGO CHAPTER OF VVAW.



Cesar Ruvalcaba, Veterans Day 2005, Chicago

The Warrior Was a Child

MARTY WEBSTER

*They don't know that I go running home when I fall down
They don't know who picks me up when no one is around
I drop my sword and look up for a smile
'Cause deep inside this armor
The warrior is a child*

When the veterans return home to southern Ohio, they are greeted at the airport by family, friends, and grateful patriots. There are welcome-home celebrations and parties. Often there are parades with bagpipe bands and motorcycle clubs. The streets are lined with well-wishers and toddlers waving miniature flags.

Of course, there are those who return to southern Ohio to be laid to rest. They are honored for giving their lives for their country (or perhaps having their lives taken from them). Once again, the bagpipes are present. The fire department is there too, with ladder trucks adorned with giant American flags to welcome the fallen heroes home. Recently a horse-drawn caisson carried a soldier to his final resting place.

Honor is always given to those who have been placed in harm's way in the service of their country.

But there are others who return without such accolades. On January 18, I attended a memorial and interment ceremony for an Iraq war veteran in Arlington Memorial Gardens, located in a small western suburb of Cincinnati. There was no hero's welcome. There were no flags, bagpipe bands, or motorcycle clubs. There was no procession. There were no parties. Very few people were there—no politicians, no media. Just the family, and a few veterans who know firsthand the horrors of war.

Specialist Douglas Barber had found peace. He was a member of Iraq Veterans Against the War who took his own life after returning from Iraq. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was a big part of why he died—PTSD that originated from the time Doug had spent in the war in Iraq. Another contributing factor was the failure of the VA to provide adequate mental-care services to heal the wounds of war.

This young man, like many others, came home to face himself in the mirror. He was not the young man who had left for Iraq. He was

a young man who had come home from war and realized what he had been ordered to do and what he had seen, and he couldn't live with it. He ended his life the way he was trained: with violence.

This is not the first time that a soldier has taken his life after returning from the battlefield. Even today, the list of the tens of thousands of Vietnam veterans

veteran from Indiana who quietly attends as many veterans' funerals in the Midwest as possible. He feels that someone from 'Nam should always be there to stand the vigil.

Jerry Smith, a US Army 'Nam combat veteran, was there. Jerry is a Cincinnati VVAW member; he is also a member of After 'Nam, a rap group of combat

streamed down the faces of the strangers. Ripped bodies, broken lives, immense pain, and deep sorrow—all came back to them. They had come as strangers, but they bonded as brothers and sisters, as they had many times, with many others, in many places in the past. But the strangers had only come to watch. Yes, someone must always be there to watch when the innocent blood of our children drips on newspapers printed in vacant lots.

VVAW will never forget. VVAW can never forget. VVAW will never leave any veteran behind, and we know all too well that people are not dead until they are forgotten.



He was a young man who had come home from war and realized what he had been ordered to do and what he had seen, and he couldn't live with it.

who have committed suicide continues to grow.

Candy Lovett was there. Candy is a Desert Storm veteran who suffers from PTSD and a debilitating spinal virus from an anthrax shot administered in Iraq. She had recently met Doug in Florida. Candy drove many painful miles to be at Doug's funeral, and she prayed that he had finally found peace.

Bob Kincses is a Vietnam

veterans who discuss how PTSD affects their daily lives.

Reverend Benjamin J. Urmston was also there. The director of Xavier University's peace and justice programs, Father Urmston is a World War II veteran and a member of Veterans for Peace.

We five had come to bear witness and to honor Doug. And as a stepsister of Doug sang "Amazing Grace" and Twila Paris's "The Warrior Is a Child," tears

MARTY WEBSTER IS A VIETNAM-ERA VETERAN WHO SERVED IN A NAVAL HOSPITAL DURING THE WAR. HE EXPERIENCED THE RESULTS OF WAR FIRSTHAND FROM A MEDICAL PERSPECTIVE, TREATING YOUNG MEN WHO CAME BACK FROM VIETNAM WITH FACIAL WOUNDS AND BURNS. MARTY ALSO WORKED WITH TDRLS AND MEDEVACS AND ON ESCORT DUTY. LIKE COUNTLESS OTHERS, HE SUFFERS FROM POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER. MARTY IS THE VVAW REGIONAL CONTACT FOR CINCINNATI, OHIO.

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Photo by William Short

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Gil Noble
Producer, Like It Is

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Jessica Lustig
Time Out New York

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Remembering the “War on the VA”

STEVE BUBLITZ

Here are some musings and memories of one vet’s tour as a member of the Milwaukee chapter of VVAW from 1971 to 1978.

I was antiwar and pro-civil rights before I enlisted in the Navy. I came from a working-class family. My dad was in Korea when I was born, and I remember his nightmares, the ghosts that stalked him: what we now know as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). An Army sergeant, he was commander of a ‘track. He got blown out of the turret twice, and was the only survivor. So I knew, even though it took years to understand, the guilt of surviving.

I was worried about the draft and was pressured at home to “straighten out my life.” After taking tests and getting my GED, I enlisted for six years of active duty in the Navy, with a written guarantee of no river boats, but

nuclear subs weren’t off the list. I lasted one month before going AWOL and working to correct my mistake. I’m lovingly referred to as “almost-a-vet Bublitz.”

I got in trouble coming out. I joined the Milwaukee VVAW chapter, and even though I had straightened out and had support, I pulled two years in prison. There I met the walking dead: brothers who came back over the line and never got help from the VA. That dead look in the eyes is something I’ll never forget. It helped me in organizing at the VA later and with many nights of friends’ nightmares, holding them and talking them back to “the world.”

Such was the latent trauma from ‘Nam. We’d be doing a march at a Memorial Day parade, the VFW would fire a volley, and half a dozen of the chapter would hit the deck. It’s in this context—losing

people to PTSD who had carried out orders and the policy of our government, and in many cases, embarrassingly survived to turn against the government—that we initiated the “War on the VA.”

Looking back, I guess volunteering to organize at the VA was a natural step for me. Back then we were outsiders, troublemakers, and rabblerousers. I had to sneak in, with leaflets and posters under cover, and dodge security to get up on the floors with the bros. I made many friends with sympathetic VA rank-and-file staff along the way.

We did takeovers of regional offices and VA hospital administration offices and organized veterans around the country to demand decent health care, recognition of PTSD, etc., until the VFW, the American Legion, the DAV, and the public joined us in

demanding justice for vets. As in past wars (going back to the Bonus March), we said, “We will not be forgotten.”

Now we’re right back where we started. A new generation: our kids. Hell, old guys like me are being reactivated and sent off to fight for democracy—spelled Halliburton. Profit. They’re coming home maimed, physically and mentally, to be discarded like so much cannon fodder. Yeah, I’m pissed off all over again. I want my country back.

It took a nationwide organization such as VVAW was and still is to accomplish these goals. That it started in Milwaukee, that I played a small part in this history...that’s one campaign ribbon that I hold dear. Peace. And let’s kick some ass.

STEVE BUBLITZ IS A MEMBER OF VVAW.

If You Ain’t Been There and Done That, Shut Your Trap

JOE BALSAMO

Sometimes I wonder how people who haven’t taken part in war can speak from the sidelines and assure those on the battlefield that everything’s okay, or dare to tell bereaved parents that their children died noble deaths for a noble cause.

It’s sort of like men picketing against abortion. There is no way you can experience the depth, pain, and choices that a woman must consider when she says yes or no on this issue. So I say to those who think they know the answer to that question: If you ain’t been there, shut up; you might learn something.

And I say the same thing to the arrogant leaders of our country who wage war on other nations and say we need to be in the Middle East for decades to “stabilize the area.” It amazes me that people who haven’t actually served in the military, during peace or war, are making decisions about whether young men and women should die for their country.

Many of these warmongers, who are sending us to war for god knows what reason, have never faced the reality of death. Bush, Cheney, and their cronies have no idea; nor do their children or their relatives and friends. They were all born with silver spoons in the

privileged class who prey on the poor and send them off to kill for their own greedy ends.

War? I have been there and done that. During my tour in Vietnam, I held little children with their bodies burned to a crisp, and saw men and women with limbs blown off, blind, dying, demented. I once

proud of those who served.

Now the same thing is going on in Iraq. Over 100,000 innocent Iraqi men, women, and children were killed by us because they were “collateral.” We pretty well wiped out the city of Fallujah because it “harbored terrorists.” And we’re talking about dropping

time sanction (or at least tolerate) the murders of men, women, and children by ourselves and our government. For what? We don’t even know.

I must testify, for those who cannot speak, that war is deadly wrong. If there is a God, and I hope there is, we will pay for this. Shame on us! We have everything, and we use our wealth to murder and maim the poor and helpless. For this, we are evil.

Should I worry about a few nondescript cells in a woman’s body, then go out and murder, maim, and steal from those who cannot protect themselves from our might? Should our priests, ministers, and leaders rail about abortion, homosexuals, divorce, and sin, but not be consumed by these murders we are committing? Shame, shame!

How can we pray to God and let this happen? How do we get up in the morning, eat, take our kids to school, go to church, have Christmas, go to the movies, etc., while allowing this to go on in our name? Why are we not consumed with anger and fear?



JOE BALSAMO IS A MEMBER OF VVAW AND VETERANS FOR PEACE, TAOS CHAPTER.

Many of these warmongers, who are sending us to war for god knows what reason, have never faced the reality of death.

held a dying sixteen-year-old American soldier’s head while his brains slipped through my fingers onto the ground. And what did our soldiers and Vietnam’s civilians suffer and die for? Anyone have a clue?

I served during the Vietnam War from 1966 to 1970. I joined up when I was twenty-four years old, because I was about to be drafted. I didn’t think it was the right thing to do, but I felt I had no choice. I had always been taught that if your country calls you, you do not question; you serve. I have since become proud of those who had the courage to resist the draft or went to Canada, as I always have been

a nuclear bomb on Iran—as if this is a casual, everyday decision, like going to the corner store to pick up groceries.

Folks, our leaders are discussing murdering people, and they call other people terrorists. Isn’t it about time we analyze what’s going on and question who has the right to make these decisions? It is said that we reap what we sow. How are we going to justify our tolerance for and lack of protest against these murderous actions? Aren’t we all responsible for these deaths?

We worry about the drugs, thefts, murders, and violence here at home, and at the same

Mobile to New Orleans: Resistance Defined in Epic Action

continued from page 1

were also at least five documentary film crews with us.

We also decided that it was imperative for Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) to lead and speak as representatives for this action. They took the lead each and every day, proudly carrying banners. They led with grace, and they led with the truth. They also did a fabulous job of sharing their experiences with their own brand of intense poetry and music. That so many of their members came from around the country is a tribute to their commitment, and their beauty on stage and in being interviewed was the icing on the cake. At least twenty-five IVAW members made the trip.

The Iraq and Afghanistan veterans did a superb job of speaking, and an even better job of performing. One after another, they went on stage and shone during the veterans' art collective, which



hard for me to understand how they could rap out multi-paragraph lyrics, with deep emotion, without even a lyrics sheet, and how they could articulate so much meaning in their heartfelt words, straight from memory.

Josh Dawson emceed the veterans' art collective and performed. Joe Hatcher and Garrett Reppenhagen did several poems on the Iraq War. Dave Cline and I

sang. Fernando Braga did a poem about Katrina, and Stephen Potts did his (now-infamous) speech comparing holding in farts to not speaking out.

Each and every night, there were late-night drum sessions that went into the wee hours of the morning. It was incredibly gratifying to see all those young vets having fun and realizing that there was some semblance left of the nation they were supposed to be fighting for. They were "home" for the first time since they went away to impose Bush's war-crime policies on the Iraqi and Afghani people.

On Saturday, a team of ten vets from the march gathered in New Orleans at the house of a veteran who had lost everything to Katrina. We worked all day with the Arabi Wrecking Krewe of New Orleans, gutting the vet's house and cleaning his yard, truly helping another veteran, citizen, and Katrina survivor, which was also part of our mission.

The other good news about the march is that we made real contact with the black and Vietnamese communities that Bush and Cheney's class warfare have most affected. Truthfully, the issues down here along the Gulf Coast are issues of gentrification

and the stealing of the land of the poorest of our citizens. We shared their music, their churches, and their food as they fed us, laughed with us, cried with us, and loaned us their land to rest our weary heads (and feet).

Day after day, we took care of each other and loved one another, and we started something that will spread like wildfire. The locals had the chance to mingle with people who loved and respected them as true equals, and the marchers and locals came together in the realization that we must stand together against a common enemy: an enemy not of color, but of class.

Yes, we did it, and the hardest part of the trip was saying goodbye to all of those who formed this incredible family, our tribe of peacemakers, on the fabulous journey from Mobile to New Orleans. 

WARD REILLY IS THE SOUTHEAST NATIONAL CONTACT FOR VVAW. HE WAS A VOLUNTEER INFANTRYMAN SERVING IN THE FAMED 1ST & 16TH (RANGERS) OF THE FIRST INFANTRY DIVISION FROM 1971–1974, SPENDING A THOUSAND STRAIGHT DAYS IN GERMANY WITH THE BIG RED ONE. HE JOINED VVAW ORIGINALLY IN 1972, AND RE-UPPED IN 2001.



Harvey Tharp

took place at the Vietnamese village in New Orleans East, where we camped the last night. The art collective was organized by IVAW's own Michael Cuzzort, a Louisiana native who lives near New Orleans. It would be a disservice to say that any act was better than any other, because they were all truly inspired. It is still

jammed. Josh Dawson and Ethan Crowell contributed performances. Billy Mitchell, a 'Nam-era vet and cofounder of Gold Star Families For Peace, read a poem about his son, who was killed in action the same day as Casey Sheehan, whose mother, Cindy, also joined us for a portion of the march. Charlie Anderson played a fine



IVAW leads the way on the approach to the Louisiana border, carrying the "Walkin' To New Orleans" banner



Iraq Veterans Against the War speaks to the marching group at the Chalmette Battlefield and National Cemetery, where the Battle Of New Orleans was fought in January, 1815. The park and its collections were completely destroyed by Katrina's floodwaters.



IVAW leads the march into New Orleans



Dave Cline at the New Orleans rally



Bill Perry



Iraq Veterans Against the War stands and speaks in Mobile at Veterans Memorial Park

World Social Forum 2006 in Caracas, Venezuela

STEPHEN SINSLEY

I have been following the World Social Forum (WSF) from a distance since its inception in 2001, but given the major social changes occurring in this year's host country, I decided to participate in this year's forum and see the changes in Venezuela up close.

We live in what Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano described as an "upside-down world." We live in upside-down times. Nevertheless, many magical things are stirring in Latin America—things that couldn't even have been dreamed of under the US-supported dictatorships of just twenty or thirty years ago. There is a movement afoot—high hopes and dreams that stretch from the Pampas of Argentina to the plains of Uruguay, Chile, Brazil, and Bolivia, and now from Washington's current nemesis, Venezuela. Bolívar's dream is stirring in the hearts of hundreds of millions to the south, and the WSF highlighted this hope.

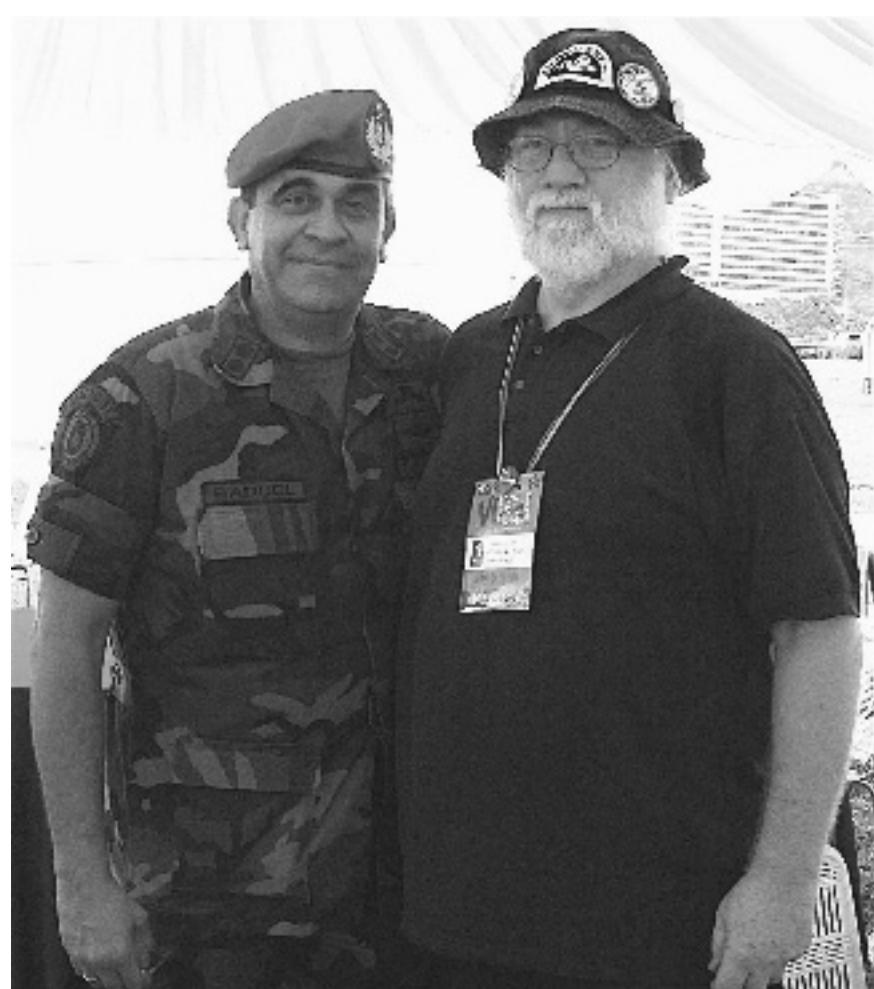
The first World Social Forum was held in Porto Alegre in the south of Brazil in 2001, and it was there that its charter of principles was adopted to provide a framework for the forum. The forums in 2002 and 2003 saw the movement grow rapidly as the WSF came to symbolize the strength of the anti-globalization movement and became a rallying point for worldwide protest against the American invasion of Iraq. The WSF has thus far taken place four times in Porto Alegre, Brazil (2001, 2002, 2003, and 2005) and once in Mumbai, India (2004); this year it was in three parts of the world: first in Bamako, Mali (January 19–23), then in Caracas, Venezuela (January 24–29), and finally in Karachi, Pakistan (March 25–28).

This year's forum in Caracas began on January 24 with a massive anti-imperialism march through the streets of the capital

city. Over the next five days, delegates from 140 countries from around the world gathered in over 2,200 workshops, panels, and sessions to discuss and debate a wide variety of issues in venues scattered throughout the city. Officially there were 80,000 registered delegates (with twenty to thirty thousand more unregistered participants), representing 2,500 organizations. Many participants complained about the excessive distances between forum sites, unlike Porto Alegre in 2005. Although the Caracas subway runs well and was free for all people sporting WSF badges, it was impossible to keep track of events in ten or twelve widely dispersed sites of activity. The "nerve center" of the forum was the Bellas Artes district, and in particular the Caracas Hilton (a fact that struck many as ironic) and the elegant Teresa Carreño theater. These sites and the nearby Parque Central boasted the best meeting rooms and the best-promoted forum activities. In places as far-flung as the military airport of Carlota or the Parque del Este, on the other hand, events were condemned to lesser attendance, regardless of interest.

The largest delegation came from Brazil, and the next largest group was from the host country of Venezuela, followed by the neighboring country of Colombia. The United States provided the fourth largest group, with about 2,000 delegates. US participation in the forum has been small but growing, and this was the first year that the United States had a significant presence.

The Caracas forum was much more monolingual than the previous forums. In Porto Alegre, the official languages were the four main colonial languages in the Americas: Portuguese, Spanish, English, and French. In Caracas,



Steve Sinsley with General Raul Baduel, commanding general of the Venezuelan Army

the lingua franca was Spanish; most people from Venezuela and neighboring Andean countries spoke only that language and expected conversations to be in Spanish. Furthermore, a growing US presence also introduced a sizable, unfortunately monolingual English-speaking audience, who at times felt frustrated in the Spanish environment. In a show of cultural pride, many indigenous speakers from throughout Latin America and North America gave their talks or posed their questions first in their native languages, and then in either Spanish or English.

The leading slogan setting the tone for the forum and reflecting its central issues was: "No to war; no to imperialism. Another world is possible; another America is possible." The dominant discourse at the forum, rather than being about war and globalization, increasingly shifted to one of anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism. Reflecting this, volunteers greeting delegates at the airport sported shirts with the slogan: "A better world is possible, if it is socialist." Another common slogan proclaimed: "Another world is necessary, and with you, it is possible." One thing made crystal clear by the forum, the delegates, the Venezuelans on the street, and by Hugo Chávez himself is the distinction between the US government (and its imperialist foreign policies) and the Ameri-

can people, themselves victims of the same policies. We all felt welcomed as brothers and sisters in the same struggle.

The World Social Forum was originally created to provide an open platform to discuss strategies of resistance to the model for globalization formulated at the annual World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland by large multinational corporations, national governments, the WTO, and the World Bank, the latter organizations being thugs and enforcers for the former. In contrast, the WSF is in itself a transparent, open process that invites the participation of progressive social movements and networks, progressive nongovernmental and nonprofit groups, and other civil society organizations to gather under the banner: "Another World Is Possible."

While many in the US corporate media (and even among sectors of the Democratic opposition to the Bush administration) seek to portray Hugo Chávez as a determined enemy of the United States, it must be recognized that he and many others on the Latin American left are making a direct and open appeal to US progressives to join their Latin American counterparts in forging alternatives to an oppressive world system. The future vectors and dynamics of such North-South political cooperation cannot be



"In a revolutionary democracy, power is in the hands of the people"

continued on next page

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predicted, but it occurred to many at the forum that the potential for such cooperation is enormous.

The size and format of the Caracas WSF made it difficult to analyze an event that may have raised more questions than found answers. How can the WSF's base act globally when the process is so deliberately diverse and most participants are preoccupied with their local concerns? How can the elite of the movement, no matter how much they talk of solidarity with the oppressed, truly represent the very people who could never afford to attend such an event? How can a global movement dedicated to improving the lives of the marginalized of the world avoid the stark class, gender, and even racial imbalances that sometimes seemed evident? How can Venezuela progress when cheap oil brings pollution and other problems?

Notwithstanding these dilemmas and concerns, visionaries seeking to make the world better seemed strengthened by the exhilarating experience of global solidarity in their local struggles for justice, peace, freedom, and the integrity of creation. Many participants, myself included, have returned to their homes renewed in their commitment to reverse the growing gap between the world's rich and poor, to address the environmental crisis,



Boston thanks Venezuela

to act on behalf of human rights of people, to care especially for children, and in many instances to bring a deep spirituality to bear on all these problems.

At the World Social Forum, President Hugo Chávez stated that there are two superpowers in the world today: one is the imperialist behemoth to the north, and the other, even more powerful, is the public opinion of the people of the world. We have much to learn from the Bolivarian Revolution, and we should take to heart Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter's

message that "in a democracy, the highest office is the office of citizen." Power is in the people, and we all need to accept the challenge of working together to form "a more perfect union" before it is too late.

The word used over and over by US participants to describe the experience at this year's WSF was "hope." The opportunity to meet activists and social workers from 140 countries made us believe that another world is possible and that we want to be part of its construction. After the forum ended, I trav-

eled for a week in the interior of Venezuela to see Chavez's social programs (*misiones*) and to talk to the people working in them. I truly believe these programs to be the best answer to the WSF's hopes, embodying Bolívar's dream of a democratic Latin America ruled by and for its people. Galeano's upside-down world may just be one day standing on its feet again.



STEPHEN SINSLEY IS A MEMBER OF
VVAW.

Attack on John Murtha: Same Tactics, Same Flag...



"I was a soldier once..."

BARRY ROMO AND JOE MILLER (REVIEWERS)

Black Virgin Mountain:
A Return to Vietnam
By Larry Heinemann
(Doubleday, 2005)

"I was a soldier once, and did a year's combat tour in Vietnam with the 35th Infantry Division at Cu Chi and Dau Tieng from March 1967 until March 1968."

This is the opening line in the newest book from Larry Heinemann, and it is quite a ride! If we were to recommend just one work on the American war in Vietnam, it would be this one, without a doubt. *Close Quarters*, Larry's first novel based on his experiences as a soldier in Vietnam, was published in 1977. Ten years later, he won a National Book Club award for *Paco's Story*. This nonfiction work should also have a special place on everyone's bookshelf.

From the start of *Black Virgin Mountain*, the reader is drawn into an extended conversation about the context that took Larry and his younger brother to military service in 1966 as young draftees. In his words, "We submitted to conscription with soul-deadening dread." He brings us the sights, sounds,

and smells of the journey to war, as well as the war's angry aftermath, which takes Heinemann back to Vietnam on multiple visits. Larry is an excellent writer, and he seamlessly weaves a tale back and forth through time.

This book is not merely a record of his return to the mountain area that dominated his combat tour with the 25th Division. It also provides an accessible history of the various struggles in Southeast Asia and their current consequences. We are reminded of the inner details of the Vietnam War, and Heinemann draws connections between it and America's other wars. There is also a 1989 meeting in Moscow with the *afghantsi*, those poor Russian grunts who found their "Vietnam" in Afghanistan with the Soviet military adventure there. (Are ya listening, G. W.?)

Heinemann's love for ordinary people everywhere comes through on every page. Through his eyes, the reader can see the beauty of Vietnam and the ugliness of the war. We can almost smell and taste it all: basic training, the fear and drudgery of the war, the

homecoming, and the postwar confusion.

Heinemann's anger remains to this day, and it is directed toward those at the top who sent us, who lied to us and to the rest of the American people, and who finally abandoned us. This work is a thoughtful and painful reminder of that era, what it cost the people of Vietnam, and what it cost those of us who served in that unjust and immoral war.

He reminds us of one of our favorite Vietnamese writers, the former NVA soldier Bao Ninh, who wrote *The Sorrow of War*. The pain, the fear, the frustration of the grunt on the ground trying to survive, to just get home—these elements are found in the work of both writers.

This is definitely a must-read for anyone who wants a down-to-earth book about what Vietnam meant, what it still means for most of us, and how we can continue on the road to reconciliation.

A VVAW postscript:

Early in the book, as he talks about his postwar feelings, Heinemann



Black Virgin MOUNTAIN

A RETURN TO VIETNAM

LARRY HEINEMANN

WINNER OF THE NATIONAL BOOK AWARD FOR PACO'S STORY

states that he never joined VVAW because "it was my understanding that the organization was basically run by ex-officers, and I'd had enough of lifers to last me quite a while (no offense, guys)." Barry (one of this review's authors) does not regret being an ex-officer, just as long as you realize that it is the "ex" part that is most important to him and the rest of the "guys" in VVAW.



JOE MILLER AND BARRY ROMO ARE VVAW NATIONAL COORDINATORS.

Jarhead Nation

JERRY LEMBCKE (REVIEWER)

Jarhead
Directed by Sam Mendes
(Universal Studios, 2005)

Commenting on films nominated for this year's Academy Awards on his February 5, 2006 show, Chris Matthews noted that films are important for what they say about the times in which they are made. For example, *Good Night and Good Luck*, he said, is about the current Bush administration's attempts to suppress the truth of governmental malfeasance, even though the film is set in the McCarthyist climate of the 1950s. *Munich*, he observed, speaks to our ongoing anxiety about national security, even though its story is about the Olympic Games of 1972 and the events that followed.

If Matthews' point is that screenwriters can write our present into representations of our past, and by that displacement, create the social and emotional distance we need for a more dispassionate perspective on where we are and where we're going, he could have used another popular film,

Jarhead, as a contrasting mirror image that represents our present as an extension of our past, but manages to do so in a way that obfuscates more than it illuminates. Although set in the Persian Gulf War of 1991 (and by implication, the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan), the subtext of *Jarhead* is about the continuing domination of America's Vietnam experience in the nation's present. We see that in the scenes of Marines getting pumped for the Persian Gulf War by watching *Apocalypse Now*, and later in Kuwait, when they gather to see *The Deer Hunter*. As the platoon trudges through the sand toward the Iraqi border, an aircraft passes overhead, blasting the Doors song "The End," which prompts a Marine to wonder, "Can't we even have our own music?" Indeed. And since the scene is clearly plagiarized from *Apocalypse Now*, film buffs throughout the theater were adding, "...and your own movie too."

Sometimes the medium is the message, and in this case,

nothing could make clearer than this film that American culture is still in a post-Vietnam phase. Given the power of film to construct new presents out of our past, *Jarhead* is a disappointing repackaging of Vietnam-film subjects—the brutality of boot camp from *Full Metal Jacket*, the sergeant out of *Hamburger Hill* with Nietzschean-themed reasons for preferring the war front to the home front, and *Apocalypse Now*, whose influences run right to the jarheads' exhibition of their own primal darkness in their farewell rave to the war. Take the riffs of those three films out of *Jarhead*, and there isn't much left.

But what is left is an even more troubling reminder of Vietnam's legacy in American political culture. Like its progenitors, *Jarhead* turns the war into a solipsistic affair about Americans; literally the only Iraqis we see here are the "crispy critters" left smoldering on the desert floor by the boys with the Doors. Oh yeah, and there are the shadowy figures of two Iraqi officers that we see in

a guard tower hundreds of meters away, just before they're blown to smithereens by an air strike.

For its own finis, *Jarhead* cops one last cliché from the Coppola/Cimino generation, that being the transformation of the war per se into a coming-home story. Almost none of the first hundred Vietnam War films made prior to 1990 had any discernible account of what the war was about; nor was there a healthy, wholesome veteran of the war portrayed. The historically grounded image of the veteran empowered and politicized by his Vietnam experience was totally AWOL from Hollywood productions, displaced by the strung-out, dysfunctional, and dangerous victim-veteran who brought the war home with him. That wiggled-out stereotype makes a gratuitous reappearance in *Jarhead* as one more cheap shot at the Vietnam generation of antiwar veterans who continue to work for peace and decent treatment of all veterans.

continued on next page

The Machine Breaks Down

BRIAN GRYZLAK (REVIEWER)

Soldiers in Revolt: GI Resistance During the Vietnam War
By David Cortright
(Haymarket Books, 2005)

Discourse over the motivations for (and the state and trajectory of) the current war in Iraq is often imbued with comparisons to the Vietnam War. It is in this context that the new edition of David Cortright's *Soldiers in Revolt: GI Resistance During the Vietnam War* (first published in 1975) is an especially salient and timely read. With an introduction to the 2005 edition by historian Howard Zinn, *Soldiers in Revolt* chronicles acts of resistance within the US military to the Vietnam War and the conditions of military life.

Cortright documents how resistance was most prominent among enlistees of working-class backgrounds, volunteers (as opposed to conscripts), and African Americans. GI resistance to the war (and various facets of military life) assumed many forms, ranging from conscious dress-code violations and attempts at unionization to circulating on-base petitions, disobeying orders, and committing direct assaults on officers. GIs spoke out against the institutional racism of the military and held rallies. With the support of civilians, they founded newspapers to disseminate information among the ranks and established off-base coffeehouses, which were venues for organizing efforts.

As the war progressed, the military faced increasing desertions, AWOL soldiers, and conscientious objectors, and declining reenlistment rates, which initially

hit the Army and Marine Corps hardest, as these branches faced the most direct combat exposure. As air assaults were stepped up in the early 1970s in place of ground forces, acts of resistance shifted from the Army and the Marine Corps to the Navy and the Air Force, and included sabotage of Navy ships, attempts to block ships from deploying to Vietnam from the United States, and on-ship sit-ins. With the end of the draft in 1973 and the subsequent drawdown of US forces in Indochina, GI organizing efforts shifted to improving day-to-day conditions of military life, focusing on challenging institutionalized racism and working toward the democratization of military life.

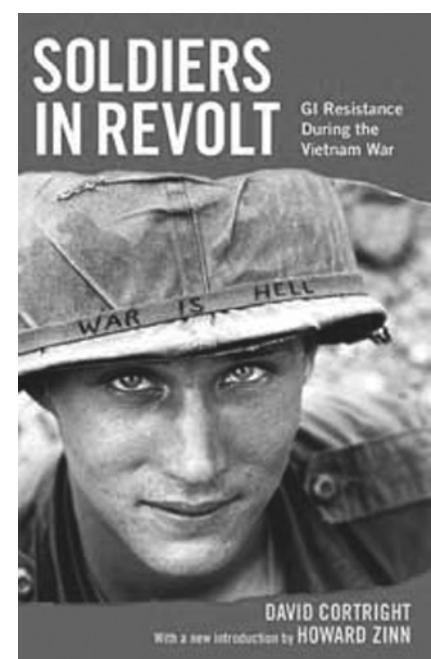
Cortright also details the "recruitment racket" that ensued once the draft ended in 1973, illustrating the deceptive, pressure-laden tactics employed by military recruiters to sign up volunteers; those with limited prospects for social and economic advancement were prime targets for recruitment (often referred to now as the "poverty draft"). Cortright highlights the non-transferability of skills learned in certain roles to civilian labor markets and the discrepancy between the demand for transferable skill sets to the civilian labor market and the supply of such rarely needed skills; e.g., those of weapons mechanics.

The global commitment of US military personnel drives the "recruitment racket" to staff an "all-volunteer" military, currently spread across over 700 bases throughout the world. Add

to the mix the unemployment and underemployment endemic in the United States, and a recipe for channeling the economically disadvantaged into the ranks of the military emerges, enabling the country to continue its interventionist policies.

In a postscript to the new edition, Cortright delves further into the extent of GI resistance during the Vietnam War; drawing from thirty years of evidence on the issue, he argues that GI resistance was much more pervasive than initially thought. Resistance among GIs stationed at bases in the United States and those stationed in Indochina (and simultaneous dissent at bases elsewhere throughout the globe) threw the status of the US military as a viable institution into question. Moreover, veterans played a critical role in stoking antiwar sentiment, and VVAW "convincingly demonstrated to the American people and US political leaders that the war had to end." In fact, the attorney general for the Nixon administration branded VVAW as "the single most dangerous group in the US," clear evidence of its effectiveness as an organization.

Absent from current mainstream media assessments of the situation in Iraq are the substantial and growing contributions of US military personnel to the opposition to the war. In fact, as with veterans of the Vietnam War, Iraq war veterans and their families have established organizations aimed at bringing the troops home, including Military Families Speak Out, Iraq Veterans Against the War, and Gold Star Families



for Peace.

Soldiers in Revolt demonstrates how GI resistance disrupted the social order of the US military and effectively undermined its ability to function. While the mass protests and social upheavals of the US civilian populace played a critical role in influencing policy, the acts of GI resistance were an enormously important factor in the withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam. Three decades later, it is clear that *Soldiers in Revolt* can be read not only as a fascinating and detailed history of mobilized discontent among GIs during the Vietnam War, but also as a resource for the current antiwar movement.



BRIAN GRYZLAK LIVES IN TIFFIN, IOWA AND IS A MEMBER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA ANTIWAR COMMITTEE AND A FORMER MEMBER OF THE PROGRESSIVE RESOURCE/ACTION COOPERATIVE (PRC) IN CHAMPAIGN, ILLINOIS.

Jarhead Nation

continued from previous page

Political veterans thereby dismissed, we're left with the film's lesson that American wars are all about the Americans we send to fight the wars. It's a lesson that collapses means-and-ends reasoning—support the troops, even if you don't support what they're fighting for—and erases the political boundaries around which efficacious debate about the war should be waged—the Right uses the troops to rally support for the war, the antiwar Left uses the specter of damaged jarheads to oppose the war.

Vietnam War films reconstructed the war as a coming-home narrative that displaced

public memory of the war itself. One of the consequences of that revisionism is an American public shorn of the kind of historical perspective that Chris Matthews applauds the Academy for valuing. Unfortunately, *Jarhead*, best-positioned of all the 2005 films by its subject matter to reinvigorate the political culture, recycles themes and imagery that enervate rather than enliven.

JERRY LEMCKE IS THE AUTHOR OF THE SPITTING IMAGE: MYTH, MEMORY, AND THE LEGACY OF VIETNAM. HE IS AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY AT HOLY CROSS COLLEGE IN WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS AND A NEW ENGLAND VVAW CONTACT.



A demonstration against the war in Iraq, Saigon, March 2003

Neocon Architects of War

KEN NIELSEN (REVIEWER)

**The Assassin's Gate:
America in Iraq**
By George Packer
(Farrar, Straus and Giroux,
2005)

Sometimes referred to as a liberal hawk, George Packer has put together a wealth of information in *The Assassin's Gate: America in Iraq*, which at times comes close to attempting to justify the war. Although this is no small issue to overlook, the book does a good job of probing into the history and probable causes of the conflict, and it provides an engaging perspective from firsthand accounts of how things have changed since the initial invasion of Iraq.

Culled from a series of articles written for the *New Yorker*, *Assassin's Gate* is not a scholarly analysis of the war, but more of an educated treatise with a series of accounts and interviews that describe to the reader one reporter's interpretation after numerous

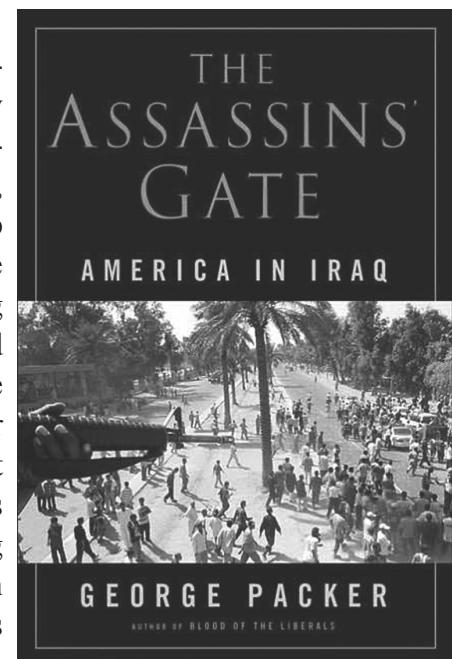
visits to Iraq over a period of two years. In contrast to many authors writing about controversial subjects, Packer doesn't attempt to force the reader to conform to one idea or another, but instead explores facts and presents personal accounts of Iraqi citizens and exiles, American soldiers, and "occupational authority" civilians (including his own as a journalist in-country). For the most part, he lets the facts speak for themselves.

Unlike most critiques of our current administration's failures, instead of focusing on Bush, Rumsfeld, and Cheney, Packer goes straight to the brains of the influential neoconservative warmongers at the time and focuses on Feith, Pearle, and especially Paul Wolfowitz. He steps back to look at Wolfowitz's family history, philosophical and ideological roots, and what Wolfowitz considered an unfinished first Gulf War; this background sets the stage for the mess that is described throughout

the remainder of the book.

While Packer doesn't present any information that is new to those who have been critically following the war in Iraq, *Assassin's Gate* does a great job of explaining the neoconservative role and background concerning Iraq, explaining the influence and misguidance of Iraqi exiles on the invasion, showing how the war was mismanaged from the highest levels, and showing the disastrous effect of bureaucratic infighting and institutional incompetence on the Iraqi people and the soldiers on the ground.

Unfortunately, the final analysis presented in the last chapter of *Assassin's Gate* is essentially that if the war in Iraq had been conducted differently, it would have been successful. In taking this stance, Packer falls into the same high-minded destructive approach to the Iraq War as its arrogant neoconservative architects. What George Packer doesn't seem to understand is that no war in which



human beings are killed, maimed, or psychologically damaged can be considered successful, regardless of the outcome or cause.



KEN NIELSEN SERVED IN THE US ARMY FROM 1991 TO 1993 (4TH BATTALION, 9TH INFANTRY, 1ST DIVISION). HE IS A MEMBER OF THE CHICAGO CHAPTER OF VVAW..



VVAW marching in New York City, April 29, 2006

Her Father's War

KELLY CONNOLLY (REVIEWER)

**Falling Through the Earth:
A Memoir**
By Danielle Trussoni
(Henry Holt, 2006)

The most persistent image in Danielle Trussoni's memoir is that of her trailing desperately after her father as he attempts to escape: stalking a deer through the snowy woods; ducking out of a bar to avoid girlfriends; speeding in his pickup, wary of police. The book centers on her struggle to understand her father, and how his experience as a tunnel rat chasing the Viet Cong in Vietnam affected her family. She yearns for the love of her father, despite his excessive drinking, irrational violence, and inability to deal with his wives, girlfriends, or children on an emotional level; years later,

she yearns for an understanding of the man who was irrevocably scarred in war, years before she was born. When he is diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, the acknowledgment provides some comfort for his daughter, but the pain from hearing her father's stories remains; the mental images, the photographs, and the unexplained skull in her father's basement persist.

The sorrow that runs through her story emanates from her father and washes over the lives of his wives, children, and girlfriends, who are drawn to his solitary magnetism and repelled by his inability to endow his relationships with anything but the bare essentials of human care. He remains in a perpetual winter in La Crosse, Wisconsin, aloof, reliving his experiences in Vietnam as if

they are more vivid than the many people who look to him for love and approval.

Her father, Dan Trussoni, recently passed away from a ravaging cancer that was caused by his exposure to toxic herbicides in Vietnam. But the book is not focused on politics; it concerns the pervasive and unsettling way her father's war experiences devastated her family.

Scrounging for quarters for food, choosing sides when her parents divorced, and growing up without a stable guide left Trussoni with a fierceness and confusion in her own relationships. Having spent her childhood years accompanying her father to his regular bars in La Crosse and absorbing his war stories, Trussoni goes on a mission to Vietnam to see the tunnels her father entered in ter-

ror in Cu Chi and elsewhere, but following her father's ghost, she cannot find the thing she seeks. The sad truth is that her father's vibrant youth was left there, never to be restored.

Her stories are open-ended. They lead down paths that are painful, but in looking for a father that could never be completely there for her (and her brothers and sisters, some newly discovered), she takes an honest look at her childhood, growing up with a man full of vitality but broken by events beyond his family's control.



KELLY CONNOLLY IS A GRADUATE OF ANTIOCH COLLEGE AND THE DAUGHTER OF MIKE CONNOLLY, A MEMBER OF VVAW.

Bravado and Compassion

JIM WILLINGHAM (REVIEWER)

Stop War America
By Robert McLane
(Corps Productions, 2006)
www.corpsproductions.com

Robert McLane, a former activist with Vietnam Veterans Against the War, has written a memoir in the style of real-time gonzo journalism. It's dedicated to the memory of Hunter S. Thompson, and it's an absorbing journey into the heart of a young man whose patriotism was in touch with essential truth and human value. In other words, he was both a US Marine and an antiwar protester; he was a survivor, a hearty vagabond whose path took him through the rigors of boot camp and the scorched earth of Vietnam. Along the way, he found the counterculture and somehow melded the two worlds into a fusion of bravado and compassion.

I knew the guy as a down-and-out vet when I was rebuilding my own shattered psyche, doing therapy at a vet center, staying awhile in Shreveport. It was a place where time stood still, save for one of the few places of enlightenment there, the weekly evening meditation group at the local Unitarian church. He popped in and plopped down, always smiling. It's what gets me the most about this guy: his joy of life. Yet Bob had all the pathos of a man

who had seen the atrocity of war without redemption (like me) and was dealing with the aftermath of that. How do you find enduring meaning in it all? How do you keep living in a strange new world?

We journey back into the Vietnam War and the antiwar veterans' movement, and through this narrative, we find a picture of history that is at once difficult and personifies a path with heart. When Bob finally gets on the freedom bird, we feel his relief. His effort at dialogue and detail throughout is exemplary.

On coming home, he writes, "I hitched a ride on a military plane going to Oklahoma. An Air Force general was kind enough to let me have a seat on his personal jet. First I watched his valet bring his luggage on board, including the two sets of golf clubs. Finally the man himself walked aboard and sat down on the solitary bed that was waiting for him. He looked at me with the eye of some jaundiced Caesar while an Air Force staff sergeant loosened his shoestrings and took off his shoes and put them under the bed. He then pulled the curtains to give the general privacy...I remembered the night at the Rockpile when Rail and I tried to make a floor out of boards from some ammo crates while the rain poured down through the leaky ponchos we had snapped together

in a vain effort to stay dry."

As it turned out, Vietnam and the Marines had prepared Bob for what was to follow, only there was no war, just hard traveling with interludes of friendship and protest, trials and celebrations. We get to encounter a number of other interesting people from those days: some famous, some infamous, some marginal at best. Bob is an interesting person. He has heart, more than any other quality, and he combines that with a healer's calm and a genuine respect of self and others—except

when he's playing Coyote, the trickster. Some might call it an attitude; judge for yourself.

When the Marines stop following dumb orders and demand honorable missions with ethical purposes, Bob's book will have realized its mission as well. Bob has an independent bravado, an alchemy of spirit; he's still a Marine, and he has hope for America. Dig it, man.



JIM WILLINGHAM IS A MEMBER OF VVAW.

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Searching for Honest History: Domestic Surveillance

S. BRIAN WILLSON

M. Palmer and his twenty-four-year-old assistant, J. Edgar Hoover, conducted in 1919 what are popularly called the “Palmer Raids” or “Red Raids,” developing a database and ordering the smashing of labor union offices and headquarters of communist and socialist organizations without search warrants, concentrating on “foreigners.” That December, 249 of the arrested were forced onto a ship headed for the Soviet Union. In January 1920, another 6,000 were arrested without warrants, mostly members of the Industrial Workers of the World (Wobblies). During one raid, 4,000 “radicals” were grabbed in a single night, and all “foreign aliens” were deported. By January 1920, Palmer and Hoover had arrested more than 10,000 Americans.

During 1917–18, as the USA entered World War I, President Wilson created the Office of Military Intelligence (OMI) in the War Department, to conduct wholesale clandestine surveillance of US citizens suspected of “disloyalty.”

Before President Truman established the National Security Agency (NSA) in 1952, government cryptologists were ordered to conduct domestic spy hunts under Project SHAMROCK. This was a super-secret operation that forced private telegraph companies to turn over the telegraphic correspondence of Americans to the government. SHAMROCK began in 1947, growing out of a World War II program that conducted government censorship of international telegrams. Until the program was shut down in 1975, the three major international carriers (RCA Global, ITT World Communications, and Western

Union International) delivered copies of messages on a daily basis to the NSA.

The NSA kicked its large spy campaign into high gear in the 1960s, especially under President Johnson. The FBI demanded that the NSA monitor antiwar activists, civil-rights leaders, and drug peddlers.

The FBI’s secret, illegal COINTELPRO (counterintelligence program) was conducted from 1956 to 1971 against American citizens, targeting the Black Panthers, the American Indian and civil-rights movements and VVAW, among others. The FBI admitted 2,218 separate COINTELPRO actions, many involving a variety of illegal operations, such as warrantless phone taps (2,305), secret bugs against domestic targets (697), and systematic interception of mail correspondence (57,846).

In 1967, the CIA initiated Operation CHAOS (and later Project MERRIMAC and Project RESISTANCE), exceeding its statutory authority in response to a presidential request that the agency discover ties between US antiwar groups and “foreign interests.” From 1967 to 1974, it indexed 300,000 names, kept 13,000 subject files, and intercepted voluminous letters and cables to compile information on domestic activities of US citizens.

However, there is evidence that Operation CHAOS began much earlier—in 1959, when President Eisenhower used the CIA to seek exiles who were fleeing Cuba after Castro’s triumphant revolution. The CIA sought contacts in the exile community to recruit them for use against Castro—arguably illegal, although

Eisenhower ordered FBI director Hoover to accept it as a legitimate CIA function. The CIA considered this a normal extension of its authorized infiltration of dissident groups abroad, even though the activity was taking place within the United States. Disdain for Congress permeated the upper echelons of the CIA. Congress could not hinder or regulate what it did not know about, and neither the president nor the director of the CIA told them.

The Department of Defense, the Directorate for Civil Disturbance Planning and Operations, and the US Army Intelligence Command conducted domestic surveillance on thousands of US citizens throughout the 1960s. More than 1,500 Army plainclothes intelligence agents worked out of 350 separate offices and record centers to spy on ordinary US residents. They operated without authority from Congress, the president, or the Secretary of the Army. Databanks were kept on as many as 100,000 individual entries, focusing on the feared civil-rights movement and the “New Left” anti-Vietnam War movement. The assumption was that there were foreign influences on the civil-rights and antiwar movements. During 1967 to 1974, presidents Johnson and Nixon repeated Wilson’s World War I OMI activities through the Army Security Agency, which worked with other military intelligence units to illegally survey

the communications and activities of US citizens who expressed opposition to the war. Called Operation MINARET, it kept a watch list of suspected Americans and collected their phone calls and telegrams made in and out of the

country. The names were submitted to the NSA by other agencies, because the targets were suspected of involvement in terrorism, drug trafficking, threats to the president, and civil disturbances.

The Department of Justice’s Internal Security Division, established under President Nixon, worked with a vast network of domestic intelligence agencies, including Nixon’s own Huston Plan (the “White House Plumbers”), acquiring information and conducting dirty tricks on “persons and organizations not affiliated with the Department of Defense.”

An intense debate erupted during the Ford administration in 1975–76 over the presidential power to eavesdrop without warrants to gather foreign intelligence using NSA. George H. W. Bush (director of the CIA), Donald Rumsfeld (Ford’s chief of staff) and Dick Cheney (Rumsfeld’s deputy) were involved. Bush wanted to ensure “no unnecessary diminution of collection of important foreign intelligence” under a proposal to require judges to approve “terror” wiretaps. Bush complained that some major communications companies were unwilling to install government wiretaps without a judge’s approval, claiming such refusal “seriously affects the capabilities of the intelligence community.” Ford supported what became the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.

In 1994, President Clinton expanded the use of warrantless searches to include entirely domestic situations with no foreign intelligence value whatsoever. In a radio address promoting a crime-fighting bill, Mr. Clinton discussed a new policy to conduct warrantless searches in “violent public housing projects.”

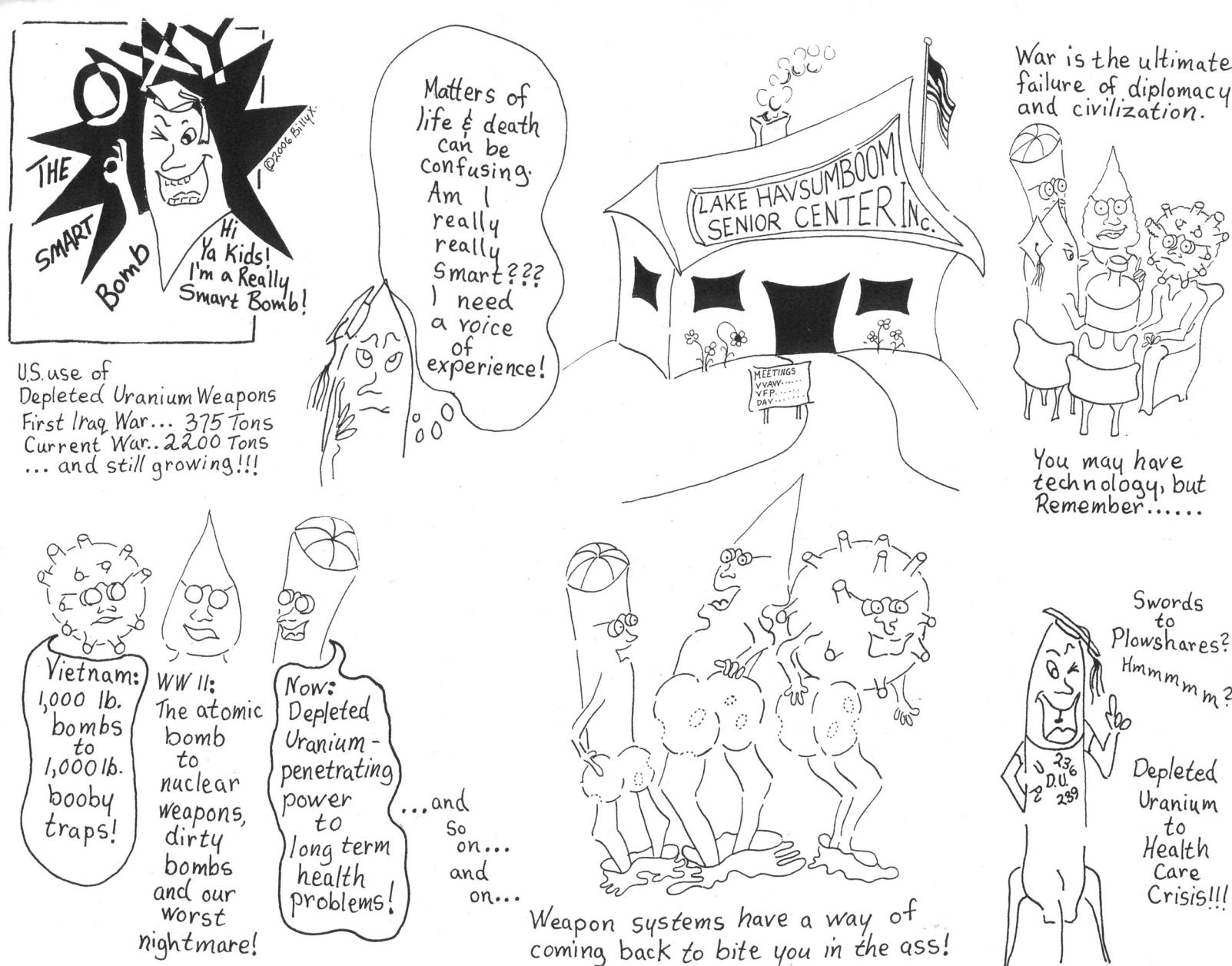
Searching for honest history enables us to possess a critical frame of reference in which to judge current policies, and in which to reevaluate the authenticity of our supposed constitutional republic.



S. BRIAN WILLSON, A LONGTIME ACTIVIST, STARTED HIS WAR OPPOSITION WHILE SERVING IN VIETNAM IN 1969. HE IS THE NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CONTACT FOR VVAW.



Stacy, Cindy, and Al marching to New Orleans



Story ideas and fan/hate mail: billyx@acegroup.cc

Sheldon Ramsdell Archive

I have set up an archive for Sheldon "Shelly" Ramsdell at Cornell University. I am requesting that anyone with Ramsdell-related items consider sending them on to Cornell when it is convenient.

Shelly's archives are far-flung. My goals for this effort are twofold: (1) to gather as much as possible at Cornell, and (2) to put the Cornell archivist in touch with other extant collections

(McGovern collection, McCarthy collection, Northern California LGBT Historical Society, etc.). I am also working with his family regarding securing potential archival holdings that they may have.

Overall, I am trying to create a comprehensive picture of his work through this collection "network." At some point, if I am able to find key pieces, perhaps I

can raise some money to begin a nonprofit book project based on his photography, with any proceeds going to support organizations like VVAW, the Alexander Hamilton and Bob Basker American Legion Posts, and the AIDS education organizations.

Please contact me directly with any questions or suggestions of people I should contact regarding Ramsdell archival materials, or

to obtain information on sending materials to Cornell. Cornell will reimburse you for any shipping-related expenses.

Thanks,

Linda Alband
Executor
Sheldon H. Ramsdell Estate
achiote@comcast.net
(415) 819-3760

4-second funeral

I'm at another funeral with that soldier in the background haze. I've learned to scan quickly: rank name age branch home town the glance at his eyes and try to know him he was the center of a universe they constantly passed through his mind his mom his dad their messages of love the most beautiful girl he'd ever known he couldn't wait to treasure again his small children close in a portrait like in his life with them they look like him brothers and sisters piecing together his story in their minds nephews nieces at cookouts and birthdays and ball games friends who grew with him and learned of his other sides and all the holidays were shining moments he shared with all of them he's left them forever and thousands of men his age alive and angry shout in the streets where he died for his army to leave their homeland and go home I have another 4 seconds to know the next soldier image I'll never see again when he fades from the screen at the close of his 4-second funeral... he was the center of a universe...

—Mike Henrich

Chávez's Venezuela

ROBERT NAIMAN

Most readers of the *Veteran* are no doubt aware that the Bush administration has been waging a low-intensity political conflict against the government of Venezuela. The Bush administration has been politically and financially supporting Venezuelan opposition groups for several years, including funding groups that were involved in the attempted coup d'état against President Hugo Chávez's democratically elected government in April 2002. As depicted so grippingly in the must-see documentary *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, the coup was reversed by popular mobilization, no thanks to the Bush administration, which welcomed the coup—about which it had prior knowledge, according to declassified documents, although this was denied at the time. The Bush administration also lobbied other governments to support the coup government.

Reporting in the US media on the political conflict between the Bush administration and the Venezuelan government often emphasizes the war of words between US and Venezuelan officials. But although no one loves to be criticized—certainly not the Bush administration—there are deeper issues at stake: control of Venezuela's oil reserves, the largest outside the Middle East; Venezuela's programs to use its oil wealth for the benefit of the poor majority through education, health, and other social programs; and Venezuela's efforts to promote regional economic integration as an alternative to the corporate globalization agenda promoted by the Bush administration.

Although right-wing critics in the Bush administration and Congress like to make vague and unsubstantiated allegations that Venezuela is subverting or threatening its neighbors, the real danger that Venezuela represents to the Bush administration is the power of a positive example. If Venezu-

elans can successfully insist on more control over their natural resources and demand that these resources be used primarily for the benefit of the Venezuelan majority, then others might be emboldened to do the same. This year, Bolivians elected Evo Morales as their president on a platform much like the one that brought Chávez into office in 1998; and at this writing, Ollanta Humala is leading in the Peruvian presidential race on the basis of a similar platform.

In addition to the political effects of the perception that Venezuela is defying Washington and getting away with it, there are real economic effects. The ability to borrow from Venezuela has bolstered the ability of Argentina and Bolivia to steer course independent of the prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Venezuela's economic and political policies are loosening the grip of the United States and US-dominated international financial institutions on the whole region.

The power of Venezuela's example is also seen in military affairs. Recently, Argentina and Uruguay have decided that they will no longer send soldiers to train at the School of the Americas (the "School of Assassins") at Fort Benning, a step Venezuela took in January 2004. As a result, efforts by the Bush administration to punish, pressure, and undermine and isolate Venezuela can be expected to intensify.

However, these efforts by the Bush administration to undermine Venezuela can only flourish if people in the United States allow it. Here are some things you could do to counteract the Bush administration's war against Venezuela:

- **Follow the press.** Every weekday, the Venezuela Information Office (VIO) prepares a selection of daily press clips on Venezuela, together with a summary. You can

get the daily *VIO Roundup* or the weekly digest emailed to you by signing up at www.veninfo.org. Reading the summary and skimming the articles will keep you up to date on what's happening.

- **Write letters to the editor.** Vicious, unsubstantiated attacks on the Venezuelan government regularly appear in the US media, often planted by US government officials. More people are needed to respond to these attacks. A short letter (less than 200 words) does the trick.

- **Write to and call Congress.** Phone the congressional switchboard at (202) 225-3121, or call your local office. Use websites to submit a comment (www.house.gov and www.senate.gov). Your representatives in Congress need to know that you oppose US efforts to undermine the government of Venezuela by funding Venezuelan opposition groups through the National Endowment for Democracy and similar programs.

- **Educate your friends.** The VIO can tell you where to find a copy of *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*. Get a copy and invite your friends over, or show it in

your union hall or religious group. In addition to being informative, it's a great movie—the filmmakers happened to be in Caracas when the coup unfolded. They caught the coup and the popular mobilization that reversed it on film. It's a powerful story.

- **Buy your gas at Citgo.** Your neighborhood Citgo gas station is actually owned by the government of Venezuela. Of course, maybe you're an eco-warrior and go everywhere on your bicycle; if so, kudos to you. If not, you might as well buy your gas at Citgo and do some good—the Venezuelan government uses the proceeds to fund education and health programs for Venezuela's poor. Find a station near you at www.citgo.com.



ROBERT NAIMAN IS A LONGTIME SUPPORTER OF VVAW. HE LIVES IN URBANA, ILLINOIS, WHERE HE IS ON THE BOARD OF THE ILLINOIS DISCIPLES FOUNDATION AND IS A MEMBER OF THE JOBS WITH JUSTICE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE. DURING THE LAST TWO SUMMERS, HE WORKED AT THE VENEZUELA INFORMATION OFFICE IN WASHINGTON, DC.

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(car, truck, refrigerator or office)



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www.supportandstop.com

Wholesale prices available to VVAW Chapters.
e-mail info@supportandstop.com for details
A portion of proceeds donated to veteran causes

Actual size 5" x 8"
Available in Yellow and Blue; and Yellow and Black



"Peoples Liberation is Not Terrorism"

He Would Tell You

Here in the secret chambers
Of my darkest heart are things
I will never tell:
Here is oily blood and brittle bone;
Here are clotted lips, frothy lungs,
Decomposed and muted tongues;
Here twisted cloth lays strangely stiff
In a powdery triptych pit,
Where a dumbstruck man and wife
Lock quicklime arms round their
Dream-face child; here,
Past the graveyard's fragrant stones,
Memory's nightmare head will not lay prone,
Its battlefields etched on a red brocade
Inlaid with a crown of skull and bones.
Yes, here in the busy chambers of my
Heart are things I will never tell,
Though I swear we did not mutilate,
Only boobytrapped or ransacked;
Did not take human souvenirs.
No, we did not do that.
So, though I nearly did,
Let me never tell you
Things you cannot know;
Let me never tell you
Things that won't let go.

—Marc Levy



Agent Orange Justice Tour, November 22, 2005, Philadelphia
Front, from left: Larry Felker, John Beitzel, Jon Bjornson
Rear, from left: Frank Corcoran, Nguyen Trong Nhan, Bill Perry, Sandy Fulton,
Ho Sy Hai, Al Kovnat, Dang Thi Hong Nhut



David Collins, Cindy Sheehan, and Ward Reilly
at the Candlelight Vigil for the Dead in Baton Rouge, September 12, 2005



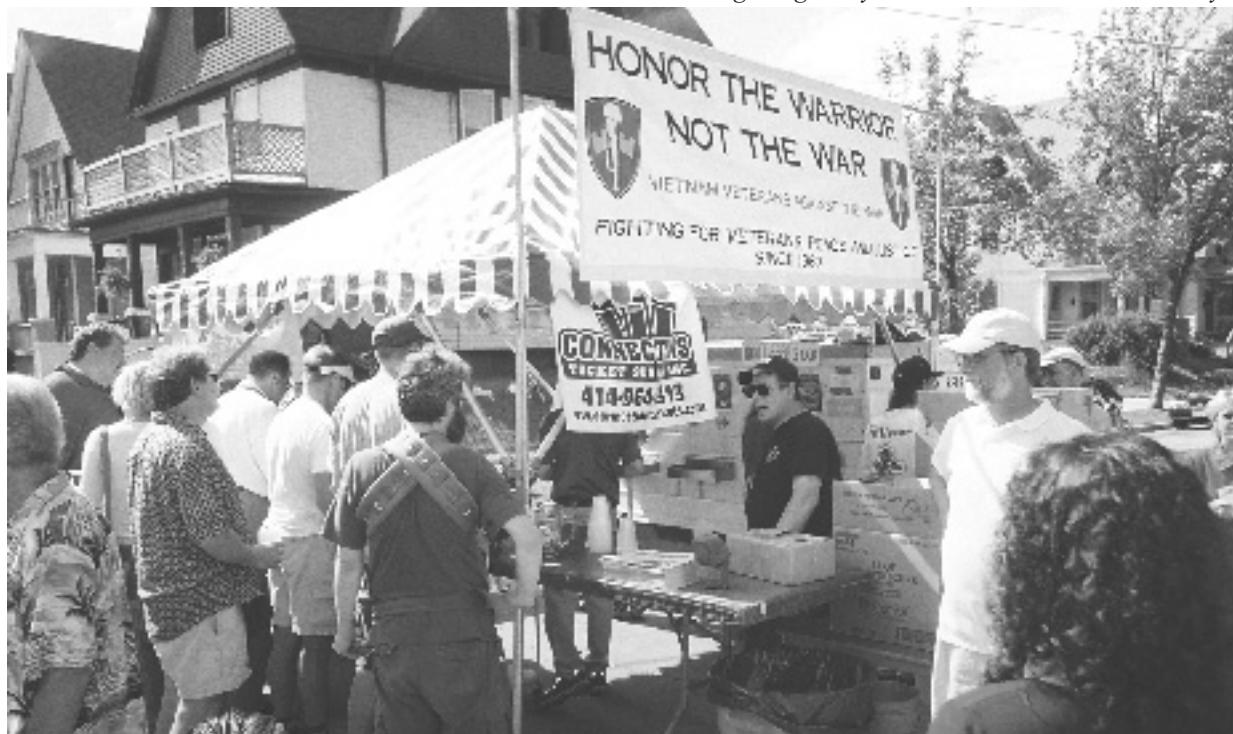
Arlington North, Philadelphia, November 2005



VVAW participating in the Milwaukee rally to end the war, March 18, 2006



VVAW getting ready to march in the Milwaukee rally to end the war, March 18, 2006



Milwaukee VVAW sells beer at the Locust Street neighborhood festival, June 2005



Veteran beer servers Roger Quindel, John Lindquist, Dave Kettenhofen, and Rich Peters have a brief lull in sales



Diane Wood, Annie Bailey, and John Zutz at the VVAW National Meeting, October 29, 2005, Chicago



Mike Woloshin, Ray Parrish, Diane Wood, Annie Bailey, John Zutz, and Jenny Ori at the National Meeting



The VVAW National Meeting, October 29, 2005, Chicago



The Extraordinarily Reverend Dan Moeller using a golden sickle to bless the beer at the 2006 Milwaukee Beer Festival



Dave Cline at the VVAW National Meeting party

Letters to the Editor

We mince no words. Time is of the essence. Iraq is a human and political catastrophe, stark testament to the deceitful behavior of the Bush administration. The dangers are clear and present, and too many human beings are dying for an ignoble cause. The preemptive war launched against Iraq on March 20, 2003 stands illegal to its roots. Premised on lies, misstatements, and subterfuge, the destruction of that sovereign nation and its people has destroyed the reputation of America, perilously debilitating its military.

These malefactions, in violation of a host of international treaties, protocols, and conventions, have placed the military, in particular its officer corps, in legal and moral peril. West Point Graduates Against the War, a grassroots movement to redeem the honor of our country, stands opposed to the Bush administration and its callous disregard for honorable behavior. At issue are the false-

hoods of the Bush administration, culminating in Secretary of State Colin Powell's presentation to the United Nations on February 5, 2003.

The West Point Honor Code ("A cadet will not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate those who do.") defines honor and duty as a way of life. This provides graduates with a lifelong sense of duty, a shared responsibility for us all to do the right thing, even admonishing our country's leadership when democracy and its inherent freedoms are at stake.

Dwight D. Eisenhower, thirty-fourth president of the United States, West Point Class of 1915, was a champion of the right to dissent. "Here in America we are descended in blood and in spirit from revolutionists and rebels," he said, "men and women who dare to dissent from accepted doctrine. As their heirs, may we never confuse honest dissent with disloyal subversion." His words inspire us to act.

Eisenhower was even clearer when it came to preventive war, the kind that Bush and his chickenhawk ilk fancy so dearly. He stood foursquare against it. "When people speak to you about a preventive war," said Eisenhower, "you tell them to go and fight it. After my experience, I have come to hate war."

When West Point graduates took their commissioning oath of office, they swore to protect the nation against all enemies, foreign and domestic. The deceitful connivance of the current administration has resulted in a war catastrophic to our nation's interests: politically, economically, militarily, and morally. The time has come for West Point graduates to speak out about these deplorable conditions.

We will not serve the lies of this administration. To remain silent is to tacitly serve. So we speak out, clearly and directly. We seek justice for all victims of this illegal war, both servicemen

and servicewomen and the citizens of Iraq. We stand opposed to the undoing of constitutionally guaranteed freedoms by this most dangerous, oppressive administration. And so too would President Eisenhower.

"If all that Americans want is security, they can go to prison," he said. "They'll have enough to eat, a bed and a roof over their heads. But if an American wants to preserve his dignity and his equality as a human being, he must not bow his neck to any dictatorial government."

Nor shall we graduates of the United States Military Academy at West Point.

James C. Ryan
New York, New York
Graduate, United States Military Academy
Class of 1962
Cofounder, West Point Graduates Against the War
www.westpointgradsagainstthewar.org

Veterans and friends will ride on bicycles to the national convention of Veterans for Peace in Seattle this summer to do their part in curing America's addiction to oil and to bring attention to the need for a spirit of individual responsibility and sacrifice. This ride was proposed by Brian Willson, who will lead it from Arcata in northern California, but several veterans will begin riding further south. I will be riding from Santa Barbara, leaving around July 18—the day I enter my sixtieth year. It would be good to ride together, so if you want to join the ride from Southern California or start a ride from other areas to converge on Seattle, please contact me.

Lane Anderson, VVAW Central California contact
andersonlane47@yahoo.com
(805) 564-2698

I am looking for any Marine who served with Danny E. Goodwin, my Canadian best friend in Vietnam. He died on August 24, 1967 near Hill 55. He was with the 1st Engineer Battalion, A Company, 1st Platoon. I was helpful in getting a website set up for him (www.canadianvietnamveterans.ca/DannyGoodwin.html).

If you served with him, please email any info you have!

Thank you,

Eric Campanelli
VVAW member
Eric2040@aol.com

I am looking for subjects to interview for *My Vietnam, Your Iraq*, a film documentary that will tell the stories of Vietnam veterans whose children have served or are serving in Iraq. Some of you may remember my earlier request, just over a year ago. I've finally received some funding, and I anticipate starting production this summer. My interest in telling this story is rooted in the fact that I am a Vietnam veteran whose father served in World War II. Veterans who returned from World War II were called members of the "greatest generation." Their sense of patriotism and willingness to serve in the armed forces was considerably different from that of their draft-age sons in the 1960s.

Although the political climate has changed, this family relationship based on military service is once again relevant some thirty years later. I'm looking for a diverse cross-section of opinions, and I'm hopeful that I can find some women that served in either war. If you would like more information, please contact me.

Ron Osgood
osgoodr@indiana.edu
(812) 855-5096



Eyes Wide Open exhibit, Veterans Memorial Park, Mobile

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 aftereffects 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 US aggression in Vietnam as well as its cost in human lives. The original MACV insignia also put forward lies. The US 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 the "Vietnam Veterans Against the War Anti-Imperialist" (VVAW-AI). VVAW-AI is actually the creation of an obscure ultraleft sect, designed to confuse people in order to associate themselves with VVAW's many years of activism and struggle. They are not a faction, caucus or part of VVAW, Inc. and are not affiliated with us in any way. We urge all people and organizations to beware of this bogus outfit.

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 _____
- Email 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

12.01.69

MICHAEL NELSON

12.01.69: the first day of the last month of the decade that changed so many lives, that changed the direction of our country, that changed the direction of my universe. One day that changed everything forever.

Just how important can a day be? Seminal events in the history of man have changed everything that would follow: the first atomic blast; the first step on the moon; viewing the first images transmitted through air; December 7, 1941; September 11, 2001; to name just a few. December 1, 1969 was the day I knew my life was about to go in a direction that I didn't want to take. A seminal event shared with my two college roommates, three amigos sitting on a worn-out sofa, fixated on a television screen, watching men pick ping-pong balls from a large metal container, ping-pong balls with numbers on them. A singular event: placing a ping-pong ball next to August 17, a ping-pong ball with the number 154. A seminal event. Goodbye, life.

Numbers...they mean more than we think. Prior to 12.01.69, I liked the number seven because of Mickey Mantle, and fourteen for

Ernie Banks; 154 meant nothing to me. When added together, the digits equal ten, and we all know about the power of ten, because we have seen the Charles and Ray Eames film. Letters and numbers

service in the Army. Numbers and letters. My draft number, 154, the number that changed my known universe. My college roommates' numbers? In the 300s, numbers that changed their known univers-

talking about births, marriages, or deaths. Well, maybe death: a metaphysical death, the death of one's spirit. I have always referred to the war as an unconscionable act. It was a decision by our nation that made no sense to me then and makes no sense to me today; that we would force young men—kids, really—to go to war. I'm not talking about just Vietnam, but any war at any time. Today, thirty-six years later, three and a half decades after the decade that changed my known universe, we are still determined to send our young men—kids, really—to war. By three and a half decades after the decade that changed my known universe, I thought we would have evolved beyond war; I was terribly wrong. Three and a half decades after the decade that changed my known universe, we still enjoy killing one another. We still love unconscionable acts. We seem to be very good at unconscionable acts.



**It was a decision by
our nation that made
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today; that we would
force young men—kids,
really—to go to war.**

in combinations that make sense only to the very smartest of the smart. Numbers and letters in combination can explain everything, even infinity.

Numbers and letters. My birthday is August 17, 1947, or 8.17.47. The digits total seventy-two, which is the year I ended my

es as well. At that moment—that seminal moment—they knew they were not getting drafted. I knew I was. My seminal moment.

I think that all people look back on their lives for that one moment that either made them or destroyed them—or, at the very least, changed them. I'm not

MICHAEL NELSON WAS A CHAPLAIN'S ASSISTANT WITH THE 212TH COMBAT AVIATION BATTALION STATIONED AT DONG HA AND MARBLE MOUNTAIN IN 1971.

GOOD NEWS...
THEY'RE GETTING
TIRED
AT THE
WHITE HOUSE.

