



# THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

Volume 38, Number 2

Fall 2008



IVAW in formation after march to Republican National Convention site in St. Paul, August 2008

## State of Disunion

HORACE COLEMAN

I recently got an offer I couldn't refuse: "Want a ride to the Democratic National Convention—and a place to stay?" So, I joined the contingent of Military Families Speak Out (MFSO) people from Southern California. A two vehicle convoy full of MFSO members and sympathizers (a van and a Prius full of people) drove straight through from California to Denver.

In Denver I listened to Cindy Sheehan and Cynthia McKinney and exchanged hugs with Michelle Obama at a rally. Before I left Colorado, I watched the tube as Barack Obama accepted the nomination for Democratic presidential candidate.

When I got home, McCain introduced his "pit bull hockey mom" running mate to the nation. I turn around and he's saying the country's "fundamentals" are "sound" while another bank fails and Houston and Galveston reel from a hurricane.

Evidently some people and things are "too big to fail" while others can't fail enough to get much help.

Something's up. To quote Malcolm X, "Chickens are coming home to roost!" The results of prior acts are presently bearing bad fruit. Now is the time to use your best judgment, act wisely and get in touch with your Higher Power (or

consigliere).

The next president is going to be faced with monumental problems--as are we all.

*Washington Post* columnist David S. Broder recently wrote that "the next president, whoever he is, will probably inherit a budget that is at least \$500 billion out of balance -- a record sum that will limit his ability to do any of the wonderful things being promised daily."

As usual, some folks won't be thinking about your best interests at all. We know there were no WMDs in Iraq, no 9/11 connection and no love lost--let alone cooperation--between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. So, why did we go there? Why are we still there? Burying the truth with the bodies? Lowering the price of gasoline? Spending lives and money we have no better use for?

Planned and spontaneous events crammed the schedule of the group I was with. Among them were:

- Attending a meeting with DNC delegates and presenting ways to quickly move troops out of Iraq without unnecessarily endangering them.
- Speaking to a policy advisor for a Colorado congressional candidate (who has a good chance of winning) about a practical way

to accelerate troop withdrawal.

- Participating in sanctioned street theater where Iraq Veterans Against the war simulated search and detain missions in Iraq (Operation First Casualty).

- Distributing leaflets to DNC delegates.

- Participating in a press conference held on Colorado's State Capital steps.

- Tabling at the Progressive Democrats of America convention (distributing literature, selling t-shirts and buttons).

- Attending a rally where Michelle Obama and Jill Biden lead convention delegates doing a "Day of Service" in filling "care boxes" to be sent to troops in Iraq and Afghanistan (double amputee Iraq vet Tammy Duckworth was

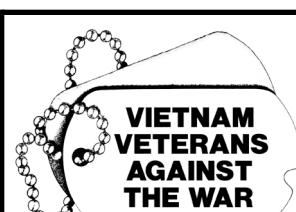
also there).

- \*Hearing Democrat US Representative Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio) speak.

- \*Meeting Col. Ann Wright, a retired Army officer who co-wrote and edited a good book about what led to US involvement in Iraq (*Dissent: Voices of Conscience*). The book, although short, is so readable and well documented that it could be a text used in classes ranging from high school to graduate school. It wouldn't hurt if a general audience acquainted itself with some facts instead of "posed to be / assumed to be" truths.

- Listening to speakers such as Cindy Sheehan and Ron Kovic

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## From the National Office

JOE MILLER

Welcome to the new issue of *The Veteran*, the semi-annual newspaper of Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW). In these pages you will find reports of local and national activities of our membership and supporters, as well as accounts from the vaults of VVAW history and reviews of various works by our members. Hell! We even write poetry!

As you read these pages, a new political administration has been elected in DC. No matter who "won" this time around, we're not going away. We shall not stop working for peace and social justice at home and abroad. We've got to keep their feet to the fire!

VVAW was established in 1967 during the Johnson Administration, and we had hundreds of our members in the streets during the Democratic Convention in Chicago in 1968. We fought like hell during the

Nixon Administration to end the war and end attacks on the civil liberties of Americans. That continued through Ford and into the Carter Administration, where we fought to protect and extend GI and veterans' benefits. This period saw the ultimate recognition of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a direct result of the efforts of VVAW and our supporters. We did not stop our activism around the issues of Agent Orange and normalization of relations with Vietnam through two terms of Reagan, one of Bush I, or even during two terms of Clinton. In that forty-year tradition, no matter who sits in the Oval Office or which party dominates Congress, the veterans' movement will cut them no slack.

Furthermore, as active supporters of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) since its establishment in 2004, we join

our brothers and sisters in their demands for:

- Immediate withdrawal of all occupying forces in Iraq;
- Reparations for the human and structural damages Iraq has suffered, and stopping the corporate pillaging of Iraq so that their people can control their own lives and future; and
- Full benefits, adequate healthcare (including mental health), and other supports for returning servicemen and women.

We call upon all members and supporters of VVAW, all readers of this newspaper, to join with us and with IVAW to keep on fighting for peace and social justice. The lives of our brothers and sisters in uniform and those of oppressed peoples around the world depend upon our continued struggle. There can be no honeymoon period for the new administration!



JOE MILLER IS A NATIONAL COORDINATOR OF VVAW.



VVAW California Central Coast Chapter at a Street Fair

### Editorial Collective

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Thanks to Jeff Danziger and Billy Curmano for their cartoons. Thanks to Aaron Davis, Suzanne Webster, Horace Coleman, Jan Kruse, Ward Reilly, Bob Gronko, Carol Trainer, Bill Branson and others for contributing photos.

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# Fraggin'

BILL SHUNAS

As I write this I don't know who got elected president. Let me just say that if it was McCain, that's scary. But the way Obama talks about Afghanistan is also scary. He's been talking tough and been making sounds like anyone else ready to escalate. This man is our hope? If he did get elected, hopefully he'll do one of his famous flip-flops on that issue. Maybe his critics are right. He don't know foreign policy. FYI for Obama or McCain: back in the 1980s, arguably the second most powerful army in the world got whipped by these Afghans - cutting and running as they say. And they want us to go there?

So far, this election campaign has been marked by what's missing. You know - support for our troops. Nobody is talking about that anymore. What kind of politicians are these? Hell, Bush talked about that for seven years. Or maybe it was only five. He hasn't said much the last two years. He now seems to be modest in his support. Maybe that's because his support was only expressed to divert attention from his lies about his wars. That don't work any more.

The Bush administration did make one interesting move, bailing out the AIG corporation. It's sort of like nationalizing this corporation. Now AIG works

for the government: like Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae and Bear Stearns. When third world nations nationalized industries, you used to count on US marines paying them a visit in about sixteen months. Look out Washington DC.

Is this the wave of the future? Maybe next we could nationalize the oil companies and fix this energy crisis. Then Washington lobbyists. The possibilities are endless. Wall Street. Wait a minute. We're doing that. That's what this bailout program is. We're nationalizing Wall Street. Socialism is around the corner.

Up to this point in September the election has been interesting, not for its politics or intellectual arguments, but because it appeals to our inner soap opera person. It started with the selection of Sarah Palin. Her arrival at the Republican convention stirred up people on all sides. Flying out of the Northland like the Valkyries in the Wagner opera (Think of Robert Duvall in Apocalypse Now with the music of the Flight of the Valkyries blaring out of his Huey in that Air Cav assault.), she hit the convention with moral righteousness and moral righteousness. She came to save the Republican ticket from looking so old and so stodgy and so Washington.

In his speech at the Republican Convention Bush said

that John McCain's experience as a POW for six years would better enable him to deal with America's leftists. What are we? Camp guards? Maybe that's what Abu Ghraib was about - teaching those prisoners how to handle the leftists in Iraq.

As far as McCain's POW experience giving him extra qualifications to be president, it doesn't fly. If anything, he has to cope with PTSD which would increase the stress on the job and put Palin that much closer to being president. Palin's lack of experience is less bothersome than what seems to be a lack of interest in the world beyond her narrow set of interests. I know Dick Cheney, and she's no Dick Cheney. Well, at least she can handle a rifle better than Dick Cheney. She's more like George W. Bush or Dan Quayle: an inherent ability to look clueless at a moment's notice. Where do the Republicans get these people?

About a week or so after Palin became the vice presidential candidate some company came out with Sarah Palin action dolls. I can't remember if there was a Dan Quayle or a Bush doll. Probably not. She's better looking, and sex sells. One doll had her dressed in a black business suit, and the other has her in hot pants, carrying a sidearm and wearing a trench coat. Sort of reminds you

of a high priced call girl who will dress for your favorite fantasy. Bush should have had a doll too. And Quayle. Indeed, isn't that what these politicians are - high priced call girls - or boys. He or she will dress up and act out or speak out according to what they think the voter wants. Then after the election they go back to their wealthy pimps.

Now that Bush is about to exit the stage, what can we say about his presidency? He came from a Brahmin family that produced senators, ambassadors and a previous president. He grew up in privilege. Was this cream rising to the top?

Bush started out as a normal Republican, doing the usual Republican thing of cost-cutting which means cutting social programs that are not needed by important Republicans. Then came 9-11, and things went from bad to deterioration. He lied to get us involved in two wars, one of which had nothing to do with those involved in 9-11. And in the other he blew the only chance to get Al Qaeda at Tora Bora and let that war deteriorate into a normal imperialist adventure without end in sight.

*continued on next page*

## Off We Go!



## Notes From the Boonies

PAUL WISOVATY

My Administrative Assistant in the probation office tells me that I'm not all that bad a guy, but that I have an annoying habit of whining. Following my column in the last issue of *The Veteran*, readers may be forgiven for arriving at the same conclusion. I asked Nam vets to help me figure out why we were so often dissed, or at the least not much appreciated, once we came home. I mean, it wasn't like we started the damned war. How did we wind up being the bad guys in this scenario?

I also confessed that, with thousands of men, women and children dying in Iraq and Afghanistan every day while I relive some past slight to my ego, my forty-years-later question might be more than a little irrelevant. But, the editors printed the column anyway, possibly for no other reason than—you guessed it—they didn't want to put up with my whining if they didn't.

I received three letters. The neat thing about them was that they were from vets from two different wars, Korea and Vietnam, and a civilian who worked with Army Intelligence during Desert Storm. I sincerely appreciate their having taken the time to write me, and allow me to share their thoughts.

The first letter I got was just signed "Korea GI Joe," from a reader who served in that war from 1952-53. He gave me quite an earful.

"I'm a Korean War vet responding to your question, 'Is Iraq Vietnam all over again?' Have you considered that the Iraq War is probably in its infancy compared to the length of the Vietnam-Cambodia (read Iraq-Iran) War supported by both Democratic and Republican administrations?

And if our Iraqistan 'volunteers' and soon draftees decide to refuse to slaughter and die anymore for Exxon Mobil, and US imperialism (I realize that your group is in denial about that term) is forced to pull out, do you expect any different reception for them than the reception when you returned from Vietnam? Both political parties support Wall Street's long range main strategic goal – dominance of Mideast oil for however long it takes, no matter what they say. And they will fight to the last drop of our blood, if we let them."

I am not certain why Korea GI Joe thinks that VVAW may be offended by the term "US imperialism," but I doubt that many of our readers will disagree with what he had to say. Thanks, Joe. If I had any idea who you are I'd drop you a line to say that, but hopefully you're reading this now.

I got a second letter from Scott Peer, who had, as a civilian, been working with military contracts for over ten years when Desert Storm broke out. He is now involved with IVAW. Scott writes that "The Gulf War made me feel completely betrayed, like some crazies stole my work. I was working Army Intelligence. People I had considered friends smiled and talked about 'killing sand niggers.' The military was targeting civilian facilities like water plants and factories hundreds of miles from the front, and slaughtering innocent civilians and POW's. Afterwards I quit in disgust, as did many of my co-workers. Many of us feel that the current military is working against us, and working against the interests of our country. People like Cheney

and his stooges, from generals to privates, are destroying the US and Iraq. Some push back from within, but some are criminals pure and simple. I feel that those who are criminals should be locked up, not cheered."

Thanks a lot, Scott. Isn't "stooges" a strong word, though? Oh, I get it. You were referring to Bush and everyone else who works for the Veep.

Finally, I heard from Arnold Stieber, a Vietnam vet from Michigan. Arnold puts 'Welcome Home' in the same category as 'thank you for your service' and 'defending freedom' and 'protecting our country,' and describing the military as 'service.' All these words make you feel good about your involvement in the death and destruction industry."

Yeah, Arny, us Americans sure love to feel good about everything we do. We feel good about the good stuff we do, and if we have to we find a way to feel good about the bad stuff too. As with No Gun Ri, many American's position has always been that if somebody else kills unarmed civilians huddled under a bridge, or invades a sovereign nation, those are war crimes. But if America does it there must have been a good reason. Double standard? Hell no! If you have any misgivings, just contact your local American Legion representative.

I do however look at "Welcome Home" in a different light than "Thanks for your service." I have always thought the former to be a Nam vet to Nam vet thing, pretty much apolitical, as a way of recognizing that no one ever said that to us forty years ago. Just my take; I may be wrong.

Arnold attached in his reply

a piece he had written called "War is Slavery – An Awakening." I would like to finish up by quoting briefly from it.

He says that "my research revealed that the main causes of war are money and markets. There is always plenty of flag waving and bluster about the 'evil ones,' but every war I've studied, once you begin peeling back the layers, has money and markets as a common core... War is only failure for one side. For the other side, war is magnificent. It is the best business in the world. High profits, little competition, products rapidly used." Arnold refers to works by Howard Zinn and General Smedley Butler, both of which reinforce what I have just quoted, and with which many of our readers are familiar. I would only add a line from *Platoon*, to which Arnold also refers. King, an uneducated but street-smart draftee from rural Tennessee, is talking to Taylor, a middle class white kid who dropped out of college because he believed that "we should all do our part in this war." King's response, following a long toke and exhale is, "Shit, man. The rich always f\*\*\*in' over the poor. Always have. Always will."

I think that says it all. If you're interested in reading all of Arnold's piece, and you should be, just give him a call. He is listed in *The Veteran* as a Michigan contact person.



*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.*

### Fraggin'

*continued from previous page*

On the home front, the only thing he has done well is cut taxes for his wealthy friends. He has subverted civil liberties, made no progress on environmental issues or energy independence, produced record budget deficits, made no progress in areas such as education and hampered the progress of science in the modern world. In general he has been an embarrassment. Perhaps the

most embarrassing thing was the arrogant and ineffectual way he handled (or didn't handle) Katrina.

In dealing with those he has had fight his wars he has failed by blowing morale, failing to supply and failing to care for those who survive - in other words, failure to support. He has disrespected soldiers below the rank of Brigadier. He has

disrespected the American people. He has disrespected the first amendment. He has disrespected his office. He has acted illegally.

I haven't had a high opinion of most presidents, but some have been qualitatively worse. Pierce and Buchanan let the country spin out of control into Civil War. John Tyler joined the other side in that war. Harding was more corrupt than most. It is among

these that the legacy of Bush should be placed. May he some day, somewhere, be indicted. He deserves that. He has shown that it's not always cream that rises to the top. Scum also rises



*BILL SHUNAS IS A VIETNAM VETERAN, AUTHOR AND VVAW MEMBER IN THE CHICAGO CHAPTER.*

# Marching on the 4th of July

MEG MINER

Fourth of July is notoriously hot and humid here in the corn fields of central Illinois. Seven years ago I wouldn't have dreamed of spending that date at a parade much less in one. But sometime after 9/11/01, I joined up with AWARE (Anti-War, Anti-Racism Effort: [www.anti-war.net](http://www.anti-war.net)) a group of activists in Champaign-Urbana. In 2003, AWARE started entering the annual C-U pageantry for patriotism called Champaign County Freedom Celebration.

Each year, AWARE's entry in the parade lampoons the chosen theme in some way. One year, the official theme celebrated the newly-passed No Child Left Behind Act, so AWARE built a float with a WWI-sized tank pointing at a one-room schoolhouse. (What these creative people can't do with a cardboard box!) People walking beside the float that year carried signs about tax dollars going to war funding instead of to educating children.

So yeah, every year it's hot and humid and I'd really rather be doing anything with a precious day off other than walking on asphalt. Sometime people get it, though. They make the connection between the subversive message and the ever-inane annual theme and from there, we hope, they connect to the even more insane policies of our elected officials. Those moments of clarity are truly special but they were never more so than at this year's parade.

The AWARE float organizers took this year's official theme "Honoring Our Military Heroes" and once again turned it slightly askew from the intended tone. AWARE's float was called "Honoring Our Military Heroes Who Speak Against War." They had six-foot tall posters made with

war dissenters' pictures and they added quotes with these heroes' own comments about the war.

The AWARE planners invited IVAW and VVAW to join their parade entry, asking that IVAW take the lead. Sometimes in past parades I've signaled my veteran status and sometimes not, but without official sponsorship I never felt I should wear my VVAW colors before. This year I was thrilled to be walking beside my VVAW compatriots at the back of the IVAW contingent. I wore my VVAW shirt and carried a sign that said I was a Gulf War vet opposed to endless Gulf Wars.

Frankly, I thought we'd get some flak along the route. It usually happens, although in recent years there seem to be more people who are vocally supportive of our message than who object to it. Most often, though, people sit in their chairs and say nothing, so I make a point of heckling the passive watchers until they

respond. Love us, hate us—I don't care, but slack-jawed apathy will not go by me without comment!

But like I said, this year was special. I barely got one smart-mouthed rallying cry out before I realized the people were with us. I mean really with us. And not just the people on the liberal side of town—people all along the seven mile route got out of their chairs of their own free will and applauded at the first sight of the IVAW banner. I only heard three negative comments the whole way, and even they weren't agitated enough to shout down the people around them. The worst comment of the day for me was when a kid read my sign and turned to his mom and said, "What's a Gulf war?" That threw me for a loop. One of the Vietnam vets beside me said, "Now you know how we feel." Time is truly a relative thing.

But my feeling of insignificance soon faded. Something special was happening

that day. To be a witness to the acceptance IVAW got in C-U from people who are sometimes not so tolerant of messages that make them uncomfortable, and to see some people mouth the words "Thank You" ... wow, what a day! IVAW brought something out of the people that day, and I think it spilled over to the VVAW line and on back to the civilians of AWARE and the posters with hard messages from the vets who couldn't be there with us. It felt like recognition for all the effort it takes to be an anti-war vet in a society that seems so casually to ask us to destroy others. It felt like C-U was honoring the warrior and the war-resister. It felt good.



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



*Joe Miller; Dave Carr and Barry Romo on the Fourth of July in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois*



*Central Illinois IVAW on the Fourth of July in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois*

## GI Rights Organizing

AARON DAVIS

No inflated body counts or statistics here sir! Military Counseling Project in Salt Lake City, Utah jointly sponsored by the VFP and VVAW chapters has reached the two year mark performing veterans outreach and the GI Rights Hotline.

Prior to that time we spoke on panels with the Director of the VARMC PTSD Department Dr. Allen. We established a working relationship with the local vet center, and used their materials to distribute to veterans. We became familiar with veterans programs in the community and other local resources that can assist veterans who are homeless or cannot access the VA System due to bad paper. We also received training on the GI Rights Hotline.

Our veterans outreach has given out 91 Veterans Benefit

books provided by the vet center. We have helped to enroll 4 veterans who did not know they could access VA health care. We passed out 16 SF-180s to vets to request their DD-214, health or service records. We have referred 6 veterans from OIF to the vet center for counseling.

My favorite area is consulting on veterans compensation and pension packets. I first got to know the American Legion Veterans Service Officer who was recommended by the vet center. I have found holes in the documentation for 7 veterans, and finally got one Vietnam Vet his 100% for PTSD and Agent Orange after 35 years of paperwork. I have the VA Guidelines and Checklists on my desk, and can immediately find reasons to appeal and local resources to help with it. Never

give up! Appeal, appeal and appeal!

The other day, a vet got on my bus and thanked me for pushing him and his brother to enroll in the VA system. His brother recently had cancer and would have added two more to the 48 million americans without health insurance. That made my day.

Our GI Rights Hotline has received 73 calls from all over the country during the past two years. The largest category of 22 calls has been advice on getting out of the military's Delayed Entry Program. On the other end, we have had 14 calls from soldiers and marines who were either considering or went UA/AWOL. We helped facilitate 5 for turn-in to Ft. Sill. Most AWOL/UA are caused by humanitarian and hardship issues that are not resolved by the chain

of command. We have had 9 such calls, which we try to help resolve within the system. Four calls from reservists wanting discharges, 2 from reservists for unsatisfactory participation, and two calls on Conscientious Objection round out the categories.

I challenge our VVAW and VFP chapters to get more involved in helping soldiers and veterans. If we say we support the troops, so let it be written, so let it be done. Refer to [www.girightshotline.org](http://www.girightshotline.org).



*AARON DAVIS IS VVAW CONTACT IN UTAH AND FORMER VFP CHAPTER 118 PRESIDENT. HIS 18 YEARS ACTIVE AND RESERVE MARINE NCO AND ARMY OFFICER SERVICE PRECEDED HIS ORGANIZING AND MILITARY COUNSELING SERVICE.*

## Veteran's Benefit Play

STEVE CRANDALL

The California Central Coast Chapter is currently working on a veteran's benefit play. The play is about the good times and the more difficult times of Vietnam veterans as they try to fit back into society. We all brought back memories and feelings that didn't play well with civilian life.

On my very first night home I introduced my parents to a small piece of my life in Vietnam. It started with my mother making my favorite dinner with steak, baked potatoes and green beans. Then I asked her to pass the FUCKING salt. Thank God they were so happy to have me home no one

thought about getting a bar of soap. Then only three days later the Sylmar earthquake hit. I rolled out of bed and hugged the floor. My dad couldn't understand why the hell I was on the floor when the first earthquake response we learned as kids was to find a doorway. These responses are small hints of what will play out in a much larger way, depending on our experiences while we were in Vietnam.

The play's message is to raise public awareness to the many psychological and physical wounds suffered by returning war veterans and to understand their

challenges as they merge with civilian life. Vietnam veterans know all too well the difficulties they experienced when they returned from the war. Forty plus years after the end of the Vietnam War far too many still wrestle with our demons. The returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans will not be exempt from the profound effects of war. We need to educate the public to the profound effects of war so they won't turn their backs on these new veterans. We can do it by sharing how war experiences changed our lives and then draw a correlation to the plight of the new veterans. No matter what war

we are talking about the impact on war veterans is the same and that's what this play will present.

If you have a story or experience to tell please let us know. You can contact Steve Crandall via email [stevecrandall@verizon.net](mailto:stevecrandall@verizon.net) or the call the Chapter phone at 805-388-1542.

Your stories are very much appreciated.



*STEVE CRANDALL IS A VIETNAM VETERAN AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE CALIFORNIA CENTRAL COAST CHAPTER OF VVAW.*

## Medical Discharges for Returning Veterans of OIF and OEF

LANE ANDERSON

Many returning disabled vets are being given honorable discharges instead of medical under honorable discharges. This places them exclusively in the VA system. With a medical discharge they are eligible for treatment in military hospitals and clinics or VA facilities at the expense of the DOD. The DAV was banned from Walter Reed after counseling returning veterans about this distinction! The DOD

does not want the responsibility of treating these young disabled vets for the rest of their lives. The military hospitals and the military - where vets are discharged - deliberately encourage vets to take an honorable and usually do not advise them of the medical.

The medical discharge gets vets better health care in more facilities, takes stress off the VA and allows the VA to recover some funds from the DOD returning the

cost of war (treating these vets) to the DOD where it belongs.

Vets given honorable discharges before PTSD or TBI symptoms disabled them can still appeal and get a medical discharge.

Support the DAV and counsel disabled vets to refuse an honorable discharge and ask instead for the medical discharge under honorable conditions. Ask your representatives to

attach a mandate to offer all disabled vets medical discharges to congressional funding for the VA.



*R. LANE ANDERSON IS A MEMBER OF VVAW AS WELL AS AN ADJUTANT, DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS CH. 37, VFW POST 1649, VVA CH 218*

# Watermelon Slim Supports IVAW

SUZY WEBSTER

On August 4th there was an excellent turnout for an IVAW fundraiser sponsored by Vietnam Veterans Against the War in Parkersburg, West Virginia. The number one Blues band in the country Watermelon Slim and the Workers were the main attraction and donated the proceeds. Watermelon Slim (Bill Homan) is a Vietnam Veteran and a long time member of VVAW.

The evening began when VVAW National Coordinator Marty Webster spoke to the overflow crowd and gave a brief history of VVAW and its relationship with Iraq Veterans Against the War. He discussed the ineffectiveness of the VA and our government's failure to address the physical, psychological and material needs of returning veterans and our active duty GIs. Cincinnati IVAW member Lt. Harvey Tharp, who suffers gravely from the effects of PTSD and other physiological maladies related to his Iraq experience, shared some of his negative experience with the USAF and the VA. Harvey received a standing ovation when he finished. Marty and Slim began the old VVAW chant, BRING THE BOYS HOME (sung) NOW! As Harvey, Slim and Marty tearfully embraced I don't believe there was a dry eye in the place. Southeastern Ohio VVAW Contact Bill Reynolds welcomed the crowd and thanked those responsible for the evening including co-host of the evening Lyn Cady from the Marietta Ohio Peace Initiative.

Earlier that afternoon the first annual Ohio VVAW get-together took place at the First



*Bill Reynolds, Watermelon Slim and Marty Webster*

Unitarian Universalist Society in Marietta, Ohio. Members of the Mid-Ohio Valley Peace Initiative, a growing number of Vietnam War veterans and everyday citizens joined together to support the latest generation of veterans. VVAW contacts Mark Hartford from Columbus, Ohio and Annie Bailey from Milwaukee joined us. Vietnam veteran Bill Reynolds of Marietta, Ohio spoke of how he joined other veterans 40 years ago in peaceful demonstrations calling for peace, justice and the protection of rights for US GIs and veterans. Reynolds said he can relate to today's soldiers because they were both asked to win wars that could not be won.

"There are some similarities,

but for the most part they are dealing with a different set of circumstances," Reynolds said. "Their casualty rates are less but their traumatic experience rates are much higher."

Marty Webster said today's vets are being forced to stay abroad longer and often to complete three and four tours of duty and many are physically and emotionally unfit for combat. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Webster said VVAW campaigned to bring troops home and to ensure veterans access to adequate medical and mental health care. Today the goals of VVAW are very much the same. According to a recent RAND Corporation study, roughly one in five soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan show symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, putting them at a higher risk for suicide. Researchers at Portland State University found that male veterans are twice as likely to commit suicide than men who are not veterans. "We have more Iraq veterans and active duty personnel who have committed suicide than have been killed in Iraq," Webster said. "We are trying to facilitate help. Webster said VVAW has helped get a veterans' suicide hot line established. The veterans' hot line, which is linked to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, received 55,000 callers in its first year, including veterans and people who are concerned

about them.

For one weekend the geography from Cincinnati to Marietta, Ohio to Parkersburg, West Virginia became an anti-war island in space and time. The evening ended as the veterans locked arms and challenged everyone present to up all their resources to BRING THEM HOME NOW! BRING THEM HOME NOW!



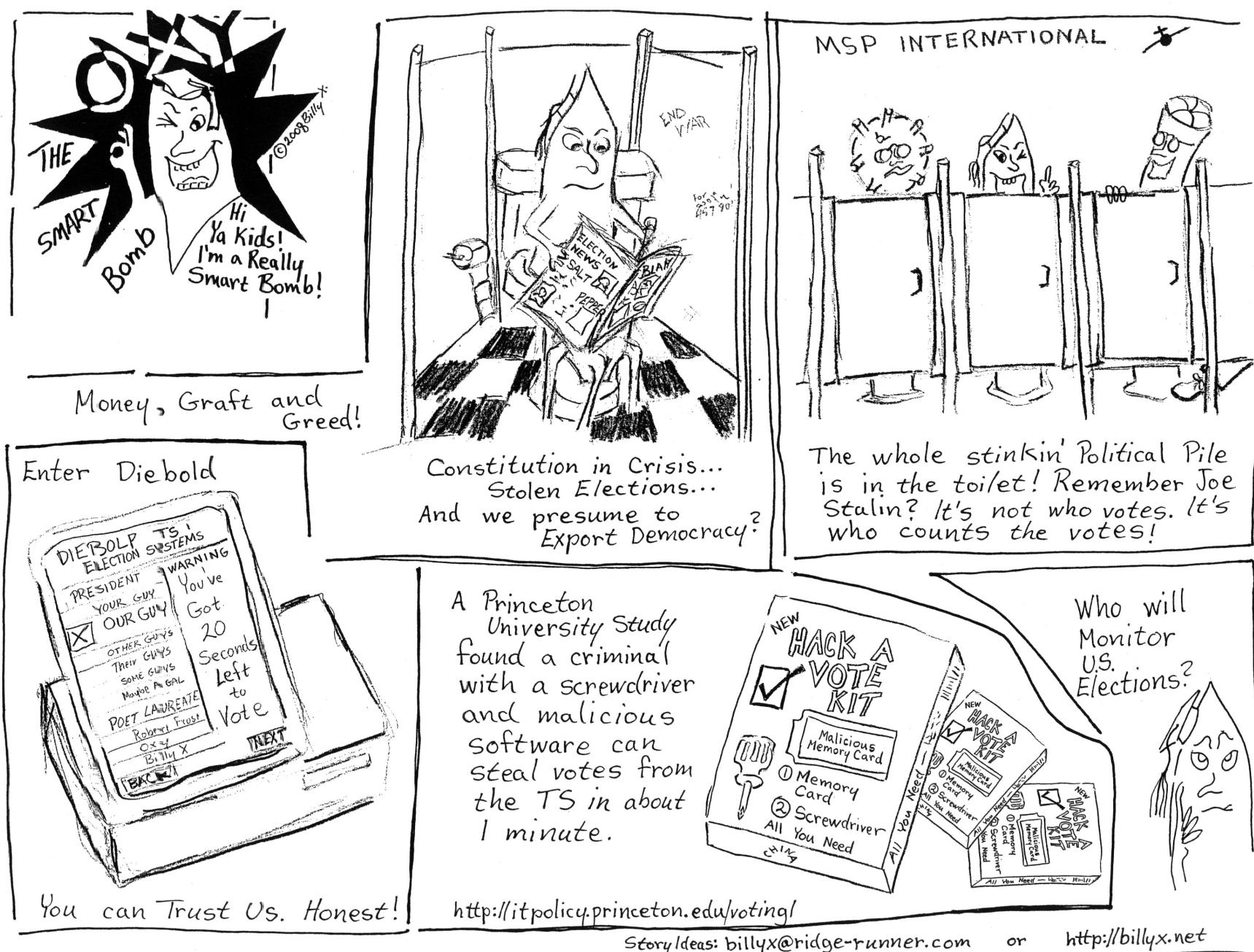
*SUZY WEBSTER IS A MEMBER OF VVAW AND THE DAUGHTER OF VVAW NATIONAL COORDINATOR MARTY WEBSTER. SHE IS ALSO INVOLVED IN ANTI-WAR ACTIVITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI.*



*Watermelon Slim embraces and thanks Lt. Harvey Tharp from Cincinnati for his participation at the concert*



*Leonard Shelton addresses the crowd at ComFest in Columbus, Ohio. Later Leonard spent a couple of days in Cincinnati speaking to college classes*



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# Courageous Soldier Chooses Conscience Over Career

CAROL RAWERT TRAINER

This is the story of a courageous young man, PFC James Burmeister, who spoke out against the Iraq War and illegal and immoral tactics. James enlisted in the US Army on June 29, 2005. He served in combat in Iraq as part of Unit 1-18, 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry from September 2006 to late February, 2007. When James returned to Germany for R&R from Iraq he was diagnosed with PTSD by military psychologist, Major Bacon. James was prescribed a variety of drugs which affected his ability to focus, eye-hand coordination and judgment. Major Bacon suspected James may have had a traumatic brain injury. Maj. Bacon did not recommend James for redeployment to Iraq but the Commander of the Rear Detachment and James' First Sergeant pressured and intimidated James and ordered him to Iraq immediately. He was ordered to tell Maj. Bacon, the Psychologist, that he was fine and was ready for redeployment in spite of his PTSD and medicated state.

On May 4, 2007 James left Germany and boarded a plane to Toronto, Canada where he lived until March 1, 2007. While in Canada James suffered from seizures, numbness, nosebleeds and was diagnosed with PTSD. He also made a moral decision to bring an end to the Bait and Kill (B&K) tactics the Army was using to lure and kill innocent Iraqi citizens. James spoke out to Courage to Resist and other news agencies to help end the tactics. In February the US government deemed Bait and Kill as illegal and immoral so James prepared to

turn himself in at Ft. Knox since his goal to end the immoral tactics was accomplished.

On March 4, 2008 James voluntarily turned himself into Ft. Knox army base in Kentucky after being AWOL for 10 months. He wrote to his Congressman Peter DeFazio (Eugene, Oregon) to request assistance and treatment for his PTSD.

On June 3, 2008 the Army read the charges to James: Deserter, Bad Conduct Discharge and a Special Court Martial with up to 5 years in prison time. James had a civilian attorney, James Branum, but later switched to a Judge Advocate General (JAG) attorney.

CNN had just had a story about how Canada was closing its doors to US war resisters. Now the Army will think that it can really put the squeeze on and pressure any other troops who may get the idea to follow in James's footsteps.

The Defense stated that on R&R from Baghdad James had time to consider his part in the B&K tactics used to lure and kill innocent Iraqis. He went AWOL to Canada and applied for refugee status. He stated that when James realized that he was successful in helping to stop the use of B&K tactics that James turned himself in to the authorities at Ft. Knox. He said he could have refused orders, but the chain of command in Baghdad told him to keep quiet about the B&K tactics. James decided not to go through the chain of command because he knew it would go nowhere. He decided to leave his unit in order to get the

word out. He heard about Vietnam War resisters who got the word out and decided to follow their example.

James agreed that he was absent 4 May 07 from his unit-118 Infantry W. Co. and he left that day. He said nothing forced him to be absent and that he agreed that he was wrong. James pled guilty to get a limited sentence.

The trial counselor said that maximum punishment is generally given: reduction from PFC to E1, reduction of pay, Bad Discharge, 12 months in jail and a possible fine. The judge stated to James that he knowingly waived his rights against self-incrimination.

James' Defense stated that in James' first 21 days in PCF (Personnel Confinement Facility). There were no doors in the rooms, the facility was monitored with video cameras, liberty was restricted and they were only allowed to leave with an escort.

He will probably serve a total of four months having 21 days deducted for time already served and also 5 days off each month for good behavior. His rank will be reduced from PFC to E-1, his pay will be reduced by 2/3 (I don't know how. They hadn't been paying him much to begin with) and he will receive a bad conduct discharge that will follow him the rest of his life-unless there is a way to overturn it. That should be our next step of action.

James stood up for his beliefs that life is sacred and the killing of innocent people is immoral. James is a hero to many of us! He can walk with his head held high. It is the government and

the prosecution that should be ashamed for choosing careers over conscience.

## How to write supportive letters to Burmeister

- James can receive as much mail as is sent. He does not have to pre-approve senders.

- Letters must not have any stickers on them or they will be returned.

- Letters can contain photos as long as they are decent photos with no graphic content.

- Letters must be addressed as follows:

James Burmeister  
Box A  
Building 7741 PMB  
1158 Gold Vault Rd  
Fort Knox, KY 40121-5184  
USA

- He can only receive packages if he has requested an approval (something called a 5-10). Once he has initiated that process from inside, packages can be sent. They must contain only what it has been pre-approved to contain. James must present the permission at post office once they call him to pick up his package.

- Nopens or paper or anything can be sent. He has to order those through the prison.



*CAROL RAWERT TRAINER IS A VIETNAM-ERA VET (USAF, A1C, 1965-68) AND A MEMBER OF VVAW.*



Kentuckiana VVAW in support of PFC James Burmeister

# Working with IVAW

SUZANNE WEBSTER

This summer instead of going away on vacation with my friends or going into a study abroad program, I chose to spend the greater part of my summer in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This was not in any way, form, or shape a vacation. My fiancée is an organizer with Iraq Veterans Against the War, and I chose to spend that time with him, and helping out in the IVAW National Office. Not only am I the soon to be wife of an Iraq/Afghanistan Veteran, but my father is a Vietnam Veteran and a National Coordinator of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. I have seen the way his generation was affected by war, but it was only this summer that I realized that my generation is now affected by the same issues and problems as Vietnam Veterans. I've known members of IVAW for over 3 years, and it was only then that I saw people who were in my generation face issues such as PTSD. It scared me that someone that I grew up with, a neighbor, a friend from grade school, or even a family member close to me in age can be affected by something that Vietnam Veterans worked so hard to stop during the 1970s and putting out the promise that "No generation of veterans should go through what we have been through." I see it happening to people I go to school with. Every now and

then I'll see the lone person with a crew cut sitting alone staring off into the distance and I think to myself "he can't be any older than I am." Volunteering this summer with IVAW and being around the National Staff I saw that they are just as young as I am, and seeing all the endless efforts that they put into what they do. They put their personal lives aside and put in 1000%.

I live in a very conservative area where every car has a yellow ribbon magnet. This is truly a flag waving "if you don't have an American flag outside your house or support the troops and president Bush then screw you" type of place. I come from a military family in which every generation from my great grandmother down was in the military. I am the first generation of my family who did not enter the military. When I was in 8th grade I wanted to join the Navy just like my dad did, but after 9/11 I started to change my mind. I then became heavily involved with the anti-war movement, not only because my dad was a Vietnam Veteran and was fighting for something he promised 40 years earlier, but also because it's MY generation. It's MY friends and MY classmates. The National Staff and the members who organize across the country for IVAW aren't terrorists or anti-American, they are the true Americans. My fiancée

joined the Army 9 months before 9/11 even happened, because he wanted to devote his life to a cause greater than himself. He served in Afghanistan for 6 months and in Iraq for a year. After only being home a few months he was diagnosed with PTSD. Being the daughter of a Vietnam Veteran with PTSD has totally changed my life. My father and I are extremely close. I never thought anything of it until

I got older and it was time for me to move on and I just never did. I just could not abandon him. Everywhere my dad went I went, everywhere I went he went. I wouldn't change any of that. Now that I am in a relationship with an OEF/OIF Vet, I see things that I never knew about my father. There isn't a day that goes by that I don't think how things would be different if my father wasn't a Vietnam Vet and my fiancée wasn't an OEF/OIF Vet and if they both didn't have PTSD, but I wouldn't change them for anything in the



Sholom Keller and Suzanne Webster

world. My fiancée, Sholom Keller, and I are getting married this coming December in Cincinnati, Ohio. My life has a turnout that I never even thought of, but I wouldn't change it, ever.

I'm a Sociology major at the University of Cincinnati. I am also involved with veteran's outreach on my campus. I, along with my father Marty Webster, and my fiancée, am organizing a much needed chapter of Iraq Veterans Against the War in Cincinnati, Ohio.



## Patriotic Oil Guys



# The Legacy of Agent Orange is a Continuing Focus of VVAW

PAUL COX

By the time you read this, the fourth Vietnamese delegation of Agent Orange victims co-sponsored by VVAW will have finished their 10-city tour, including a stop in Chicago where they were hosted by VVAW. Public events were held at the Gage Gallery in Roosevelt University and at the Jane Hull House, and they were interviewed on NPR's *World View* program. Bob Gronko did a great job organizing their stay in Chicago, and VVAW made a generous donation to support the tour.

VVAW has a long history of fighting for justice for victims of Agent Orange poisoning; VVAW was a loud and clear voice exposing AO and calling for help and compensation for veterans suffering the ill effects of AO/dioxin since 1978. In recent years, VVAW has strongly supported the Vietnamese people in their efforts to achieve recognition and for relief from the massive damage AO/dioxin has done to their environment and their people.

VVAW has hosted in Chicago Agent Orange victims delegations in 2005, 2007, and October 2008 (the other delegation went only to DC). The delegations are from the Vietnam Association of Victims of Agent Orange/dioxin (VAVA), which is the membership organization in Vietnam fighting for justice for the Vietnamese. Dave Cline and Bill Davis—both of whom we lost last year—and many others in VVAW have worked hard on the AO issue, which continues to develop



*Mrs. Dang Hong Nhut, translator Ms. Dinh Thi Minh Huyen and Ms. Tran Thi Hoan  
at Agent Orange victims tour in Chicago, October 2008*

as more information becomes available about its effects. But much more work is needed.

As reported in the last issue of *The Veteran*, the US Court of Appeals failed in its duty to reinstate the VAVA lawsuit against the chemical companies that was dismissed by Jack Weinstein. On October 6, attorneys for VAVA filed a writ of certiorari with the Supreme Court asking them to hear the case for reinstatement. This court, though, is not likely to accept the case, but the Vietnamese want to exhaust all remedies. Whether or not the case dies at the steps of the Supreme Court, the struggle will continue.

As you may know the Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign

(VAORRC) is one of the organizations in the US that is working to support VAVA. Dave Cline and Bill Davis were on the national board and national coordinators of VAORRC, as are VVAW members Barry Romo and Paul Cox. At the steps of the Supreme Court, VAORRC launched the international corporate campaign against Dow and Monsanto: "Do the right thing – compensate Vietnam's Agent Orange victims!" Next year VAORRC will mount a legislative campaign to convince Congress to step up to our responsibilities and provide—if for no other reason—real funds for humanitarian assistance to the Vietnamese victims of AO. The legislation has not yet been written, but a number of influential congress members and senators have expressed firm support for such a bill. When the bill is submitted, it should have provisions for a number of distinct projects:

- Environmental clean-up of the forty identified hotspots.
- Stationary or mobile clinics for pre-natal testing of pregnant women who may have been exposed to AO.
- Testing programs for populations living near hot spots for dioxin in their bodies.
- Genetic and epidemiological research into the multi-generational effects of dioxin exposure.
- Reconstructive surgery for the many children with

deformities whose lives could be improved by it.

• Prostheses, wheelchairs, accessibility modifications to habitat, and independent living training for those who can benefit from such aid.

• Medical treatment for those sick from AO.

• Long-term supportive care for those who are disabled from exposures or birth defects.

• Financial assistance to those families driven into poverty due to disabilities or birth defects of family members.

Getting comprehensive well-funded legislation through Congress will take a major advocacy effort. If it is to be successful, it will require some effort from every VVAW member and supporter, and every person in this country who thinks our nation needs to step up to its responsibilities. Once the legislation is introduced, we will all have to contact our representatives and urge them to support it. Actually, in some cases, we will have to not only urge it; we will have to require it, insist upon it, demand it, and shout it. It will be a fight worthy of VVAW!



*(l-r) Mrs. Dang Hong Nhut, Ms. Tran Thi Hoan, translator Ms. Dinh Thi Minh Huyen, Steve Nelson and Bob Gronko at WBEZ, Chicago Public Radio,  
October 2008*

*PAUL COX SERVED AS A MARINE  
IN VIETNAM FROM 1969 TO 1970  
AND IS A MEMBER OF VVAW. HE  
IS ON THE NATIONAL BOARD OF THE  
VIETNAM AGENT ORANGE RELIEF  
AND RESPONSIBILITY CAMPAIGN.*

## State of Disunion

*continued from page 1*

at a community arts center.

- Visiting a Denver park where peace/anti-war groups had booths, speeches were given and open air classes were held about non violence and organizing. [IVAW members were there manning a replica of a detainee camp guard tower. I passed out back copies of *The Veteran* with articles in them about IVAW and Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan.]

The burden of the unnecessary Iraq war falls on members of the military who are doing repeated tours of duty and subjected to Stop Loss orders that prevent them from leaving the military--even if they have completed their enlistment or are eligible for retirement.

The other Americans directly affected by the war are the immediate and extended families, lovers and close friends of troops. With the exception of those sending care packages, cards and making visits to, or assisting, newly wounded or convalescing troops, the public supports the troops by saying "I support the troops!" No batteries or other action required. Although, as the economy declines and the national credit card bill comes due someone is going to be disappointed.

There were no WMDs in Iraq. We found none and Hussein used none because he had none. Secularist dictator Hussein had no connection to, or cooperation with the 9/11 attacks, Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda or the Taliban. Even after the US government knew this, it made Iraq the focus of its hissy fit and put Afghanistan on a way

back burner, allowed bin Laden to "disappear" while we focused on no bid contracts in Iraq for under performing US corporations and grandiose schemes and dreams of "reforming the Middle East."

It really makes little difference if bin Laden is caught, executed or already dead. He's already shown what a fanatical Tar Baby can do to a big ol' bear with poor judgment.

In the mean time, our Iraq adventure has lasted longer than World War II and PTSD is heavy among those actually bearing the burden. The military has a high rate of suicides. Female troops are being raped by male troops and dying in "mysterious" ways.

People who would make good Non Commissioned Officers (the back bone of a military) and captains who would be good majors are leaving the military.

The empire is in trouble. Banks and mortgage firms are going bankrupt. More jobs are being lost than created and natural disasters are piling up. Not to worry. It's just a temporary blip in the business cycle. Prior corruption, corporate Ponzi schemes and greed have nothing to do with it. This is USA!! USA!! The laws of physics and the examples of history don't apply here (so some think). Those who know better will have to do better—or at least the best they can.

How to tell a war is really bogus

- Not enough volunteers
- No draft to staff it
- Repeated deployments by



IVAW guard tower in Denver, CO at the DNC

troops

- No taxes assessed to pay for it
- No tangible support from the public or a demand on it
- Those that incite don't fight
- No military service for most leaders, politicians, the affluent or ordinary civilians
- Poor health care for veterans
- Recruitment standards lowered
- Amputees allowed on active duty (if wounded while on active duty)
- The *casus belli* (justification for war) is poor or keeps changing
- The *casus belli* disappears / collapses
- War profiteering/fraud becomes rampant
- Military actions that create more enemies than they kill neutralize or convert
- War waging expenditures and activities neither increase national safety nor advance National interests while decreasing the nation's quality of life

nearby. The three of us got into a brief conversation. Maybe he stopped because of the sign saying "War is not the answer" held by a nearby member of the vigil or the t-shirt my friend was wearing that simply said "Veterans For Peace."

When asked that question that can set gangbangers off ("Where are you from?"), the young man said he was "living in Southern California now." After a little chit chat he said he was a marine from Camp Pendleton, had done a tour in Iraq and was going to be deployed soon to Afghanistan. My friend said "We don't have any thing against you." Why should we? We were both Nam vets. We knew the realities of the military and being a trooper in war time. "We don't think this is a good war, is all" my friend said.

Many can't make that distinction. Everything is black and white/all good or all bad. They don't know (or remember) how much gray there is, how ambiguous things can be sometimes. How your feelings can shift (or solidify) before, during and after joining the military, having a war experience or reflecting on it afterwards.

There can be many different combinations of reasons for joining the military, some idealistic, jingoistic, knee jerk impulse,



Michelle Obama at Day of Service in Denver, CO

Addendum: Talking with a war bound young Marine

There's been a peace vigil on Second St. in the Belmont Shore section of Long Beach, California for years. In front of the failing Washington Mutual Bank the last time I was there, a trim young man with a short hair cut stopped by where I was tabling. A member of Veterans For Peace was standing

*continued on page 15*

# RNC in St. Paul Reveals Neocon Dream of (Police) State

WARD REILLY

Veterans took an active role in protesting the occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan at the Republican National Convention during the first week of September, 2008, in St. Paul, Minnesota. During the week before the RNC, both Iraq Veterans Against the War, and Veterans For Peace held their national conventions in Minneapolis, and they both ended their respective conventions with 2 protest marches with only veterans and family members. Many VVAW members were a part of all of the events, acting as marshals for IVAW in their march. On Monday, September 1st (Labor Day) there was a statewide march with approximately 25,000 in attendance.

What the veterans witnessed on the streets in St. Paul was the truth about the neocon dream, and the right-wing vision for the USA as a police state. There were many different government agencies involved in "security," and Blackwater-type goons were out in force. What we veterans saw was the current US administration shitting on the Constitution, especially the Bill of Rights, and thereby shitting on the service

and sacrifice of every man and woman who has sworn to defend our nation and its laws. 900+ people were arrested, gassed, maced, or shocked with stun guns, including many journalists who were simply trying to report the facts of the day.

As during Hurricane Katrina, the Republicans again partied on, this time at their convention, while large areas of southern Louisiana and the Texas Gulf coast were devastated by hurricane Gustav. The republicans delayed their grand opening for 6 hours on Monday, to show how much they care. And again, we can only say, "thanks for nothing."

\$50 million dollars was given to both St. Paul and Minneapolis for security by Homeland Security, and they used the money to outfit a gestapo-like presence in the Twin-Cities, formerly known to be progressive and peaceful. The hundreds of brand new SUVs, and millions of dollars worth of technology that \$100 million purchased, only shamed both cities and shocked the local population. Never in my life have I seen such a massive group of robo-warriors, armed to the teeth, and ready to

act against peaceful citizens that were simply exercising their right of dissent against the war criminals in Washington DC.

On Sunday, August 31, during the veterans march from the Capitol building to the RNC site and back, police reps told the organizers that anyone would be arrested if they left the parade route, so a handful of us volunteered to resist. At a predetermined intersection, a dozen or so of us challenged the police orders by going around the barricades to march off-route, breaking off from the main contingent of 1000 or so veterans that were marching. We called their bluff, and they didn't touch us.

I think that the sight of police arresting innocent veterans and Gold Star parents for walking down a street (that they own), all documented on film by many journalists, would have been a PR disaster for the RNC, so we were allowed to march unmolested, escorted by about 250 robo-cops. None of the veterans or Gold Star members were arrested. I, Ann Wright, Mike Hastie, Bruce Berry, Hal Muskat, Leslie Harris, and a few others were among

the group of civil-disobedience-minded resisters. We marched behind a flag-draped coffin being pulled by Gold Star father Carlos Arradondo and his wife Melida, who's son (Army Sp.4) Alexander Arradondo was KIA in Iraq. Also resisting police orders with us was Gold Star father Juan Torres, who's son Juan Jr. was also KIA in Iraq.

On Monday morning, IVAW had a separate action, in which they marched from the capitol to the RNC to present their demands regarding Iraq, to John McCain, and the McCain camp was too cowardly to send a rep out to receive their demands, in spite of many attempts to arrange a meeting. A week earlier, IVAW had marched in formation to the DNC convention in Denver, and there they were met by a member of Obama's staff who DID accept a copy of their demands. The neocons proved yet again that they have no courage, nor do they care to hear from the actual veterans of their filthy and criminal occupations.

Non-veterans weren't so lucky during the entire week, as more than 900 people were arrested, many for simply being there. The police were short tempered, and were ready to attack at the slightest provocation, and everywhere in the city, even at a concert, the police violated the civil rights of our citizens, rounding up and arresting 200 at an anti-war music event. In St. Paul, some windows were broken, and some newspaper boxes were tipped over (perhaps by police infiltrators??) and the police used those acts as an excuse to go wild with tear gas, concussion grenades and tasers.

All in all, the republicans showed their true colors at the RNC, fascism in the guise of a political party. The RNC was a true vision of what life in the USA will be like, if we don't stop them first. It was truly something to behold, and to have been a part of.



WARD REILLY IS THE VVAW BATON ROUGE CONTACT.



VVAW member Bill Perry with wife Terry at Minnesota capitol with banner

## Another Déjà Vu Flash

WILLIE HAGER

Winter Soldiers, then and now; speaking Truth to power. Hopefully, this time, the "Change" will actually take. Unlike the last time. And when the champion wins the day, that they honor their words with actions that benefit us all, not just a few voter demographics, like they did after we threw Nixon out and gave the government back to The People.

I was in Miami in 1972, with the California contingent of the Last Patrol, and was on the Silent March. We were faced off with the Florida Highway Patrol, and elements of the 82nd Airborne and Florida National Guard. There was fear in their eyes as we shuffled silently by, on our way to the Fontainebleau, where Nixon was holed up. Our silence unnerved them, just as it was intended to do. I am sure that

many of them thought that we were going to keep marching right up to the Fontainebleau penthouse (Nixon Bunker) and drag him out into the streets, for all to see and publicly revile. They were visibly relieved when we pulled up and rallied around the front of the hotel and began making speeches supporting our Demands, and accusing Nixon and his cronies of being war criminals. You coulda' cut the tension in the air with a knife. What a rush!

I was in front of the tube, down here in Cracker Swamp, as the New Winter Soldiers of IVAW made their March to the doors of the Pepsi - I'm a Coke man, myself - Center, with their Demands. I pretty much watched full coverage of all the days; never a blip...media blackout, much as with the Winter Soldier IandA in Silver Springs,

Maryland, this past March. I didn't know that The March had happened until I received an e-mail from Jan Ruhman, a back to back VVAW Brother, from The Day. He is also a major So Cal IVAW Supporter, and the Southern California Organizing Contact, for VVAW, with the *LA Times* IVAW DNC piece attached.

When I opened it, and saw the picture of the IVAW marchers, striding silently, with such purpose; I really did have a déjà vu flashback! What a rush! I knew then that Hope was alive. That the imagery of those few proud Americans facing off with the powers that be, and having their demands met in such a public way and in face of such overwhelming odds, would once again, demonstrate to the American People, as it did in our day; that the power of

True Change lies in the principles and in the hands of those willing to sacrifice to bring it about; it is then the Constitutional Duty of the American People to see that it is placed and retained in the hands of those who share the same principles and sense of Truth; and who won't sell us out, again, for personal, political, or capital gain.




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*WILLIE HAGER WAS VVAW REGIONAL COORDINATOR FOR CALIFORNIA & NEVADA 1972-1974. HE IS CURRENTLY THE ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATOR AND CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF WWW.VETSPEAK.ORG. HE IS A PROUD MEMBER OF VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR.*



*Miami 1972*



*Crowd at St Paul capitol building during the Republican National Convention protests*

## State of Disunion

*continued from page 12*

patriotic, pragmatic, self testing, sense of adventure, etc. reason. One thing's certain: In the military you get more responsibility, and sooner, than you would in civilian life and for less reward. It's a rarity in civilian life when some one dies because of what you do or don't do properly. The military don't guarantee you the job you want, who you'll fight and why; not even where you'll live. Things can quickly go to hell at any instant in a war zone; faster than that in combat. Neither one of us asked the gyrene what he thought about the war nor politics or some dumb civilian question like "Did you kill any one?"

Military jobs fit into two broad categories: Killing or in some way helping people who do kill. Duh!! I did ask "What's your MOS (Military Occupation Specialty)?" "Combat engineer" he said. "I disarm IEDs (Improved Explosive Devices--home made bombs that cause most of the casualties in Iraq). Mostly blow them up."

The young woman he'd been walking with had come back. You could tell they were a couple by the easy way their hands fit together. Married? Lovers? Not my business. No need to ask. He shook hands with me and my friend. "Come back with what you left with!" I said firmly as he walked away. I meant that. Hoping that he would but knowing that even if he did there might be a little something extra and unpleasant with him.

A face of war. A reminder of why I was on Second Street. Not to persuade, inform or influence a troop but to do my little bit to inform civilians (many of whom are still clueless about Iraq) that all troops should at least have a justifiable war to fight and decent

treatment when they come home. That's part of "supporting the troops."

### Addendum II: The Silly Season of Presidential Campaign Time

A column published in late September by *Washington Post* conservative columnist George F. Will began:

"The queen had only one way of settling all difficulties, great or small. 'Off with his head!' she said without even looking around." -- *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

That column ended: "Conservatives who insist that electing McCain is crucial usually start, and increasingly end; by saying he would make excellent judicial selections. But the more one sees of his impulsive, intensely personal reactions to people and events, the less confidence one has that he would select judges by calm reflection and clear principles, having neither patience nor aptitude for either."

It is arguable that, because of his inexperience, Obama is not ready for the presidency. It is arguable that McCain, because of his boiling moralism and bottomless reservoir of certitudes, is not suited to the presidency. Unreadiness can be corrected, although perhaps at great cost, by experience. Can a dismaying temperament be fixed?

A news article published by *Washington Post* Staff Writer Juliet Eilperin the same day as Will's piece bore this headline: Palin, McCain Disagree on Causes of Global Warming. The story's first two paragraphs were:

"No one, including Gov. Sarah Palin, questions that Alaska's climate is changing more rapidly



IVAW tabling outside the DNC in Denver

than any other state's. But her skepticism about the causes and what needs to be done to address the consequences stands in sharp contrast to the views of her running mate, Sen. John McCain, and place her to the right of the Bush administration and several other Republican governors."

"Although Palin established a sub-cabinet to deal with climate change issues a year ago, she has focused on how to adapt to global warming rather than how to combat it, and she has publicly questioned scientists' near-consensus that human activity plays a role in the rising temperatures."

In the mean time, racist and conservative voters are busy sending out e-mails and holding conversations where they say "Obama's a Muslin / Arab" and "I wouldn't vote for an African American / darkey / nigger!"

Given the Dynamic Duo the Republicans have chosen, will al Qaeda contribute to Obama's campaign? The Gophers? I think they'll save their money. And, just let us scorch our own earth as McCain starts his own war and the US economy continues to disintegrate.

Benjamin Franklin was supposedly asked as he left the meeting in Independence Hall that established the form of government the US had "Well, Doctor, what have we got—a Republic or a Monarchy?" Franklin is said to have answered "A Republic, if you can keep it." The odds of that happening now seem longer than drawing a Royal Flush. What we seem to have reached is oligarchy, plutocracy and corporatocracy. Franklin also said "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety." No fuzz on that. I guess we'll just have to shut up and suffer. Fat chance!



**HORACE COLEMAN WAS AN AIR FORCE AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER / INTERCEPT DIRECTOR IN VIETNAM (1967-68). HE ALSO SERVED IN TACTICAL AIR COMMAND, PACIFIC AIR COMMAND AND NORTH AMERICAN AIR DEFENSE. HE SPEAKS AT GRADE SCHOOLS, HIGH SCHOOLS AND CHURCHES AND LIVES IN LONG BEACH, CA.**



MFSO marching at the DNC in Denver

# Winter Soldiers: An Oral History of Vietnam Veterans Against the War

KURT HILGENDORF (REVIEWER)

## Winter Soldiers: An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War

By Richard Stacewicz

(Haymarket Books, 2008)

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

Gary Okihiro, in *Oral History and the Writing of Ethnic History*, writes that "Oral History is not only a tool or method for recovering history; it is also a theory of history which maintains that the common folk and the dispossessed have a history and that this history must be written." No better approach could be applied to the history of Vietnam Veterans Against the War, an organization made up of thousands of returning veterans in the 1960s and 1970s who felt detached from, and often spurned by, the rest of American society, and an organization that for more than forty years has stood for justice for not only veterans but common people and the dispossessed writ large. Indeed, Richard Stacewicz's *Winter Soldiers: An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War* provides the most insight into the backgrounds of VVAW members and the day-to-day struggles of members and chapters around the country of any of the books on VVAW, precisely because he gives voice to national leaders and local chapters, founding

members and those who became involved toward the end of the war, women and men. The voices of those VVAW members included in *Winter Soldiers* describe an actively - and locally - engaged, decentralized organization, a group that not only organized and participated in large events over several years in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but one that also pushed for justice in communities across the United States. *Winter Soldiers* had been out of print for years and was somewhat difficult to acquire. Fortunately, it was re-released by Haymarket Books in September of this year. A book of this import demands to be read.

Oral history is often derided in the academy as less than real history. Since it does not rely on primary source written or visual documents, many historians believe that oral history is less valid and reliable than traditional histories verified by newspaper or magazine reports, letters, photographs, video footage or official government documents. While documentation is important in establishing the facts of history, what happens when there is little documentary evidence of an event? Events still happened, and memories of those events, while potentially clouded by personal judgment or forgotten details, have historical relevance as powerful

stories experienced first-hand. Even when documentary evidence about a particular event is plentiful, oral history allows us a much deeper look into what transpired. The people who were involved tell their interpretations of what happened, and critical readers can draw their own conclusions of the events, especially when presented with differing interpretations of the same activities, as Stacewicz does for many of the major VVAW actions. Perhaps just as importantly, oral history evades two significant drawbacks of traditional histories based on written documents. Since those defined as leaders or newsworthy are the ones covered by media (and government agents), traditional history overly focuses on those at the top. Furthermore, given the propagandistic nature of much of our media, many primary source accounts are often colored by ideological bias. Oral history is a natural counter to that ideological bias – who better than those who actually participated would know why they were there and what they intended to accomplish, the effects of oppositional activities, and the long-term impact of a group's work.

An author's role in an oral history, then, is to tie interviews together to create a larger narrative, putting into context disparate accounts and creating a coherent whole. Stacewicz proves especially effective in weaving such a narrative. The true power of his account of VVAW, and why this book should be the starting point for anyone interested in VVAW's history, is Stacewicz's focus on two areas: 1) why VVAW members went to Vietnam and then joined the organization upon their return and 2) how the organization's development and activities outside of the national office demonstrated VVAW's true strength.

As one reads the first chapter of *Winter Soldiers* s/he cannot help but recognize the commonalities between VVAW members' explanations for going to Vietnam: for most, patriotism and anticommunism; for many, a religious (and often specifically Catholic) upbringing. Many saw the service as chance to learn an employable skill. Many interviewed had desire to escape

the boredom or drudgery of their immediate surroundings. In a foretelling of VVAW's later work, working class backgrounds and anti-racist sentiment are prevalent in members' upbringings. Stacewicz's deft editing and pacing make what could be considered unnecessary background information seem vibrant and engaging, and he puts these stories in their proper context of the dominant "Go America" discourse of the 1950s and 1960s. While other books on VVAW give time and space to soldiers' motivations for going to Vietnam, none of them go into such rich detail.

Stacewicz is equally adept at identifying why veterans chose to join VVAW. Veterans' stories of their wartime experiences document both the racism toward American soldiers of color and the Vietnamese and the way in which this racism allowed the committing of atrocities to be official policy. Contradictions were everywhere: soldiers could not possibly be fighting for democracy when brutality was the norm, either through their own actions or those of their alleged South Vietnamese allies, who were hated for their contempt toward their own people. Idealistic motivations that led these soldiers to Vietnam were exposed as misguided—the real enemy of their ideals was the war itself, and if those ideals were to be maintained, for these citizen-soldiers, action had to be taken. VVAW proved to be that outlet, a way for vets to heal themselves and to prevent others, both American and Vietnamese, from suffering the same fate in the future. It is precisely this element of VVAW, an organization made of regular people who are empowered to make change, that is such an important legacy; witnessing this analysis from those who were part of it makes *Winter Soldiers* an essential read. Mike McCain puts it succinctly: "We started understanding as a group of people [that] it was easier to be a Soldier than it was to be a critic of the government, of the state, of the society; but that if we were to be true citizens, that's what we had to do. You can't accept things at face value. You have to be a



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## Winter Soldiers

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member of society. You have to argue. You have to decide whether or not something is right or wrong, and then once you've made that decision, act upon it. That was the biggest thing we did as an organization, and that's why so many people are alive today."

McCain's analysis is telling, especially in regard to the often-anarchic nature of VVAW chapters' day-to-day operations. Stacewicz fills *Winter Soldiers* with robust accounts of how chapters formed and worked. Few returning vets had any previous activist or organizing experience, yet they felt compelled to do something to bring about an end to the war, for themselves, their fallen comrades and their country. As such, chapters throughout the country started working to oppose the war before they even called themselves VVAW, talking with returning vets, talking with GIs who were leaving for war, fomenting and supporting military resistance on bases, organizing for democracy within the military, attending anti-war rallies and speaking events. These local activities were heavy on symbolism and improvisation; decisions were made as needed by those involved with doing the work. It was precisely this local work that built the organization and kept members tied to the organization so that the most well known large events could even occur. Stacewicz's oral history, of all the books about VVAW, gives the most space to this vitally important chapter-level work, and the accounts included are often humorous, sometimes tragic and always insightful into how social change can be made.

It could be argued that Stacewicz's comparatively light coverage of VVAW events like the Gainesville 8 trial or the Agent Orange lawsuit make *Winter*

*Soldiers* less essential than books like Gerry Nicosia's *Home to War*, which goes into substantial detail about both legal battles. Such an argument, however, is predicated on the contention that only major stories are historically relevant. Indeed, oral history is designed to give a historical voice to those shut out of traditional histories, to tell those stories that should be heard. This is not to say that everything one might want to know is included in *Winter Soldiers*. More analysis of how the stress of the Gainesville 8 trial affected local chapters, for instance, or how the trial may have impacted the national office's turn toward ultra-leftism would be welcome and relevant for readers who are trying to sustain organizations during tough times. On the whole, though, such a criticism is a minor one. Stacewicz's approach makes *Winter Soldiers* the essential VVAW history —this book allows a reader to truly understand the gritty details of how the organization lived and breathed and struggled.

One final benefit of oral history is that it provides a permanent record for those whose lives ended prematurely by ensuring that their stories will live on. We may no longer be able to speak with Jack McCloskey, Dave Cline, Bill Davis, Shelly Ramsdell or John Kniffin, but we can continue to learn from their insights. Here's to hoping that their work will inspire current and future generations to be those true patriots and citizens who fight for justice.



KURT HILGENDORF IS A SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER AT JOHN HOPE COLLEGE PREP HIGH SCHOOL IN CHICAGO AND A MEMBER OF VVAW NATIONAL STAFF.



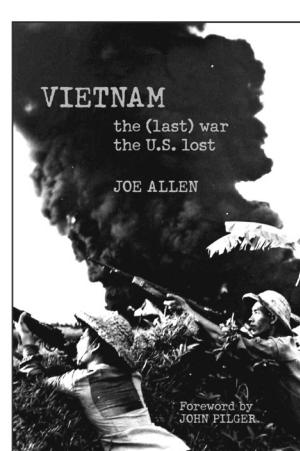
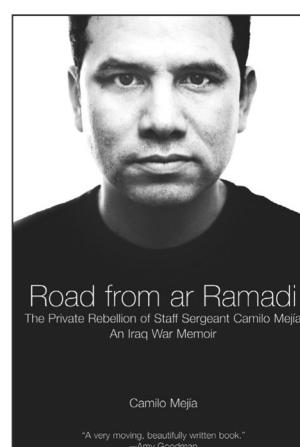
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# IVAW Anti-Warriors Descend on Monument Circle

MARTIN SMITH

On March 29, 2008, a chilly Saturday afternoon in downtown Indianapolis, a small group of anti-warriors gathered who were just as scruffy in their appearance as they were dedicated to their cause. Fourteen Iraq Veterans Against the War members from three different chapters in the Great Lakes Region gathered at a small protest that was held at an odd, behemoth tower that pierced the sky and stood in sharp contrast to our message.

We staked our own claim to "Monument Circle," a phallic structure rising almost 300 feet and decorated with mammoth-size replicas of white, battle-torn soldiers and sailors, but we carried an opposing demand from the one captured in limestone to our aft. We stood in lock-step formation, proudly carrying our IVAW

banner, as messengers against an immoral war and in stark contrast to the memorialized victors of steadfast patriotism, frozen in time and place at the obelisk's base.

This second annual event titled, "Five Years Too Long," was sponsored by Indiana students and local peace activists and was held just days after the 4,000th US troop had died in Iraq. Vince Emanuele, Derek Giffin, and Erin Constantine spoke to the crowd calling on them to join the Winter Soldier Movement and the new war that we were prepared to fight as foot soldiers for peace. As Vince so aptly put it, "This war won't be stopped by the politicians, but only by us, building the new GI Movement."

While this small protest, and others like it, will never end the war by itself, the event should be

judged not by the war's trajectory but rather for how it served as a path to strengthen the GI Movement. It was a potent reminder of the power of protest. Our large turnout of members brought us together in a collective show of solidarity. Older members mentored newer ones and welcomed them aboard.

We garnered media coverage, with journalists glued to our individual stories like politicians on the gravy-train of corporate giveaways and graft. And rather than being someone else's "window-dressing," we stole the show with a full frontal display backed up and supported by the local peace movement. Activists and community members not only supported our cause but also donated generously to our various chapters when we passed the hat.

But even more, we made contact and networked with new allies, activists, and leaders who are now part of the Winter Soldier Movement. Even at a small protest in the middle of Midwestern cornfields, it is possible to do the essential base-building that can rebuild a grassroots, bottom-up movement—the kind of social movement that can not only end the war, but one that may also set roots which will allow future generations to build monuments of a different kind, ones that celebrate humanity and peace rather than war.



*MARTIN SMITH, FORMER SGT.  
USMC, IS MIDWEST REGIONAL  
COORDINATOR OF IRAQ VETERANS  
AGAINST THE WAR.*

## Teach Your Children Well

STEVE CRANDALL

*Reprinted from the Ventura County Star*

One of the most rewarding opportunities I have as a contact for the Vietnam Veterans Against the War is to be able to help students with their class assignments. It seems around this time of the year I receive several requests from high school students to be interviewed about my experiences and thoughts about war. This year there seemed to be more students requesting interviews than usual. Maybe it's five long years of war in

Iraq that has spurred their interest. This is a war that has now lasted longer than anyone of them has attended high school.

In the past they, especially the boys, wanted to know if I ever killed anyone and if I did what did it feel like? This year they didn't ask any of those questions instead their questions were more thoughtful and more mature. They asked me about my happiest moments. They wanted to know what I treasured the most and was I afraid? There were some questions that caused me to relive unpleasant

experiences but it is a feeling I am willing to endure if I can teach only one child about the tragedies of war. To help them understand war is not a video game. It's real and the consequences are devastating.

I know these children will have to endure the economic consequences of this war but I sincerely hope none of them will have to endure the physical and mental tragedies of this war or any other war. As elders it is our responsibility to teach our children well. The following are lyrics by Graham Nash of Crosby, Stills,

Nash and Young.

*Can you hear and do you care*

*And can you see we must be free*

*To teach the children to believe*

*And make a world that we can believe in*



*STEVE CRANDALL IS THE PRESIDENT  
OF THE CA CENTRAL COAST  
CHAPTER OF VVAW.*

### Oil Companies Get No-Bid Contracts Back in Iraq



## Allegedly So...

A VETERAN

*VVAW members know those in power make laws to protect their own interests. When those interests turn to illegal and immoral war, they need to be stopped. As witnesses to war, we've realized we have a responsibility to expose the greed, horrors and lies that keep this history repeating. Sometimes, we have to cross the line of a polite society to fight fire with fire. We have avoided preaching in favor of dramatic events that have educated while entertaining. The big actions often become legendary, but the valuable creative little capers from chapters across the country can be lost in the shuffle. We need to fill in the blanks to complete our history and perhaps inspire future generations faced with this same madness.*

There are veterans of war and its atrocities that don't tell their stories. There are those of us that can't. Maybe it's less painful to tell anti-war stories. Maybe the antics of the past can serve as inspiration or at the very least a curiosity for the present and future peace movements. I won't mention any names, but it is alleged that Vietnam Veterans Against the War has been involved in anti-war activities since it's inception way back when. This is a place to share our often humorous, sometimes less than legal and perhaps almost heroic attempts to derail the war machine.

Allegedly So...It is alleged that in those heady days the Milwaukee chapter of VVAW, with a nod to the beeps and boops of censorship, had a volunteer unit they referred to simply as bee-boop. It was just a handful of frustrated vets tired of signing petitions, protesting, marching and voting with very little result. They had all been patriotic young men

with high ideals willing to go to war for their country to protect its claims of freedom and to do right for the world. They lived in the shadow of an America that came to the rescue in World War II.

The new mission was to save the world from Godless Communism. But then they found out, it was all more about money, war profiteers and lies than any political ideology. They had been lied to, used and cast aside. The nation was torn between blind patriotism and an end to the Vietnam War. The Veterans Administration denied there were problems from Agent Orange and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The new class of veterans had served and wasn't even being cared for properly upon their return, but that's another story.

The team members were all ready and willing to cross the line and go to jail if necessary, but they were also practical and committed to nonviolence. Before each excursion, they met with a volunteer lawyer to discuss the legal consequences of their action and often shaped it accordingly. They realized with each arrest they would be draining money from the very movement they hoped to support. They were all sworn to secrecy in that grand old tradition of "loose lips sink ships."

It was probably late June. We were still at war in a far off land when the call came over our tapped telephones. A coded message said the Bee-Boop team would be activated for a special Independence Day statement.

It was a simple, yet eloquent thought. We would turn the American flag upside down – an internationally recognized signal of distress – at one of Milwaukee's grandest Fourth of July celebrations. It would

be tricky. There was still plenty of animosity between pro and anti-war forces. Aging VFW vets would be performing a 21-gun salute and the Milwaukee Police Department would be passing out ice cream to the kiddies. We needed precise military style, yet non-violent, tactics.

Lake Park is a beautiful site. It sits on the top of a steep wooded bluff overlooking Lake Michigan between a quiet city street in an exclusive neighborhood and the very busy Lake Drive below. A scenic – country like - winding road connects the two. So here was the plan:

There would be a get-away van with driver parked on Lake Drive. A small number of allies would be stationed in the audience armed with literature about the war. Another couple of supporters on ten speed bicycles would create a diversion with fire works behind the main park lodge. And finally, teams of combat infantry vets in full camouflage would lay motionless in the woods, rush the flag, pop smoke grenades and in the confusion bring her down and put her back topsy-turvy amidst all the confusion. Then, a hasty retreat down the steep slope – hopefully a little too steep for the VFW vets and the Milwaukee Police to keep up or actually follow – and finally scrambling into the idling van and a safe escape to Hooligan's Bar to regroup and boast about the action.

The best laid plans...

Okay, so there was a walk through the day before to make sure the logistics would work. The camo clad vets arrived well before dawn and lay so still that even park workers picking up litter did not discover them. It is alleged that one stuck his pointy tipped paper picker upper within a foot of me.

My breathing was so shallow as to be almost nonexistent – and he gave me no notice.

The fire works exploded. We rushed the flag screaming for affect and absolute confusion. The smoke grenades were popped and the flag came down. Alas, it took some time to reverse it and try to get it back up. The VFW recovered and was after us with their old M-1's at the ready – not locked and loaded – but ready to swat us like flies. We had seen this as a possibility and with our commitment to nonviolence sounded a hasty retreat. We ran for the slope. Everyone made it. No casualties. But at Hooligans, the adrenalin was still raging and we were disappointed that we didn't get the flag back up. This called for a plan B.

Growing up in Milwaukee, I had often admired the patriotic and always well-manicured floral display that nestled below a proudly waving American Flag at the top of North Avenue in Reservoir Park. It was at the highest point in Milwaukee just a few miles straight up from the Lake. Traffic flowed up the very busy artery and steep incline for a great view looking directly into the park and its flag. Vehicles even had to slow for the sharp curve to the left and then right around it.

A new plan relying more on stealth than shock and awe was developed. The Bee-boop unit took to the hill and quietly scouted the fence that separated them from their prize. Signals were established and lookouts posted around the park. The strike force went over the chain link, barbed wire barrier and low crawled to the flag. It was run down with great efficiency and returned to its post upside down. The team made it back over the barrier without incident and another successful get-away followed. Peace activists and the anti-war community were rewarded with a full color photo of Old Glory in distress on page one of the city's major daily newspaper.



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Central Illinois IVAW on the Fourth of July in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois

# Beating Bogus Discharges

RAY PARRISH

Many veterans suffering from PTSD end up with less than honorable military discharges or discharges for personality or adjustment disorders. Appropriately worded psychological evaluations can cause the military Discharge Review Boards and Boards for the Correction of Military Records (DRB/BCMR) to upgrade the discharges to honorable or even to medical retirement. The same evidence will allow the VA to change the diagnoses and to determine that there was no dishonorable service to bar entitlement to benefits.

One of the most immediate and severe symptoms of PTSD is just the kind of behavior that can result in UCMJ charges and a discharge for misconduct. This cause and effect can be explained in a psych evaluation. It can then be argued that the military is responsible for the misconduct because they failed to provide treatment for the PTSD. The VA can't give compensation to someone who has served dishonorably. For VA purposes, the psych evaluation can be used to support the argument that there was no dishonorable military service and that the vet served honorably until the

untreated, service connected PTSD affected the vet's ability to serve honorably.

Many GI's have a hard time getting a PTSD diagnosis for a variety of reasons. A valid diagnosis of personality disorder is based upon behavior over a period of time and typically manifests

connected if the symptoms were present during service or within one year of military discharge. You can also be given more than one diagnosis if the symptoms indicate this. So, it's important that the veteran find a mental health professional to produce this evidence. It's possible that

**Even if the GI/vet did have problems during the teenage years, combat stress often aggravates or exacerbates any pre-existing condition, making it service connected.**

itself during teenage years in disciplinary problems or arrests. Without evidence of this, the diagnosis is bogus! Even if the GI/vet did have problems during the teenage years, combat stress often aggravates or exacerbates any pre-existing condition, making it service connected. To say that a vet is having trouble adjusting to life after combat is typical of PTSD and to say that it's merely an adjustment disorder is both inadequate and an insult.

It is also possible to get any diagnosis (like depression, anxiety or bi-polar disorder) service

the VA will help in this if the vet is willing to try going to the VA. Vets with bad discharges can get free treatment for service connected disabilities (but not monthly compensation checks) if they can give the VA Vet Centers and Medical Centers evidence of service connection. That treatment can then give the vet access to doctors who can write supporting evaluations.

If the VA is out of the question, there are volunteers willing to help. The Soldiers Project can give you referrals if you call 877-576-5343 and leave a message.

At the website of giveanhour.org you can click on visitor and get contact information of volunteers in your area. So, a mental health professional can review military medical and personnel records (or records from the first year after discharge) and assert that the symptoms of the problem were noted in the records. They can then explain how the misconduct was caused by the untreated combat related stress or they can explain how the symptoms support a change in the diagnosis.

After winning VA compensation, the vets will have the free treatment and monthly checks which will allow a long battle to get an accurate discharge. With proper evidence the DRB/BCMR can change a discharge to a medical retirement discharge. This means the monthly checks come from the DoD budget not the VA's, which means less money for bullets and more money for helping vets.

Unless you give up, they won't win.



**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.*

## Vietnam Veterans and Asbestos Exposure: Important Health Information

SAMANTHA CATALANO

The brave men who protected our freedom during the Vietnam War faced no shortage of occupational dangers. The risks associated with military conflict in an unstable and unfriendly nation may seem obvious, but there is also hidden danger. Exposure to asbestos is the only conclusive cause of mesothelioma cancer, and hundreds of US military veterans have been diagnosed as a result of exposure while on active duty.

Veterans were exposed to dangerous levels of asbestos in several ways, but the majority of veterans were exposed while aboard naval ships and military aircraft. Asbestos was widely used in the form of piping insulation prior to the institution of asbestos usage regulations by the federal

government in the early 1980s. Asbestos insulation was a perfect choice for naval ships and aircraft. Damaged or disturbed it becomes a serious health hazard. Damaged asbestos-containing insulation can release tiny asbestos fibers into the air. If inhaled, the fibers can situate inside the lining of the lungs for decades before the afflicted individual may begin to suffer from common mesothelioma symptoms, such as dysphagia, difficulty breathing and chest pain.

Veterans who receive a diagnosis of mesothelioma, also known as asbestos cancer, are generally between the ages of 50 and 70, as the latency period associated with this disease is between 20 and 50 years. Once

diagnosed, the vast majority of mesothelioma patients will lose their battle with this particularly aggressive type of cancer in less than 2 years, and less than 1% will survive. There is presently no cure. Veterans who suspect that they may have been exposed to asbestos while serving in the US military should consult with a doctor to determine their risk of developing mesothelioma. There is medical and financial assistance available specifically for veterans who are diagnosed with this debilitating disease, and there are a variety of mesothelioma treatment options available for those suffering from the disease, such as chemotherapy and radiation.

The Mesothelioma and Asbestos Awareness Center (MAA

Center) is the web's foremost resource for information regarding veteran asbestos exposure and mesothelioma cancer. The MAA Center is accredited by the Health On the Net Foundation (HON) as a trustworthy and reliable source of medical information on the Internet. For further information, please visit [www.maacenter.org](http://www.maacenter.org).



**SAMANTHA CATALANO IS THE PUBLIC OUTREACH COORDINATOR AND CONTENT DEVELOPER FOR THE MESOTHELIOMA AND ASBESTOS AWARENESS CENTER (MAA CENTER). FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT MS. CATALANO AT SCATALANO@MAACENTER.ORG AND VISIT WWW.MAACENTER.ORG.**

# My Personal Journey with PTSD

MICHAEL ORANGE

"Seek the help you need and deserve. It can work." This is what I've said to so many veterans who, like me, suffer from combat-related Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Over my four-decade journey from the free fire zones in Vietnam to the present, I got very good at recognizing the triggers that, two or three times a year, would precipitate a debilitating emotional crash. With my wife, Cynthia's, help, I decided finally to seek professional help after President Bush's invasion of Iraq in March 2003 sent me into a dark psychological pit of utter emptiness. I had health care at the time through my job so I began a course of treatment with a private therapist. Since my therapist had also been a Marine grunt who saw combat in Vietnam and shared my interest in Eastern philosophy, we were on the same wavelength. Eventually, the VA agreed with his PTSD diagnosis. I underwent nine months of intense talk therapy (without drugs) that culminated in a three-month medical leave of absence from my job. The experience was transformative.

Jung wrote, "One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light but by making the darkness conscious." Through the help of my therapist, I recognized the two warring inhabitants that tugged at my psyche: The first

was the traumatized twenty-year-old soldier, and the other was the falsely empowered young man who took on an attitude of contempt for his own pain. To use a male-female analogy, the timid feminine voice felt the pain of the trauma and the tears flowed, and a moment later the harsh masculine voice immediately said to stuff it and quit whining. It was like those cartoon characters of the devil and angel that sit on opposite shoulders giving opposite directions.

In Vietnam, we used to say, "It don't mean nothin." It was a necessary lie then and most of us continued to live that lie for decades after we got back. My crash experience is like turning emotional cartwheels—feeling, stuffing, crying, being embarrassed, then berating myself; then starting over again. I did not understand it; could not explain it; could not control it. My crying like a baby so embarrassed me, I only felt safe in Cynthia's loving arms. This would go on and on until I didn't think I had any more tears left in me and the day had gone by.

Of course, for years I had also exhibited the typical external manifestations of PTSD including hyper-vigilance, startle response, agitation, emotional numbing, etc. I learned that PTSD is a form of depression. We use defenses to

suppress traumatic memories and to mask the internal depression. Many vets medicated their pain with alcohol and other drugs. My drug of choice fit my near-Type-A personality. I became a compulsive overachiever bent on seeking constant approval from others—performance-based self-esteem; what a good friend called, "atta-boys."

My therapist said that the harsh boy had served to protect me from the poison of war and to help me develop a good life but that I was now mature enough and strong enough to take the next step and begin to re-integrate all aspects of my personality. We did this extremely difficult work together mindful that I should not use Vietnam and PTSD as a convenient excuse whenever reality did not match up to my expectations.

The following diagram illustrates my therapy. I worked harder than at any time in my life to understand at a fundamental level the inter-linking of the combat events that caused the PTSD with the childhood trauma that preceded them in my case (I hear of many vets whose therapy began, like mine, with childhood issues that had to be resolved along with the PTSD). Only until I could bring full compassion as regards the effects these past

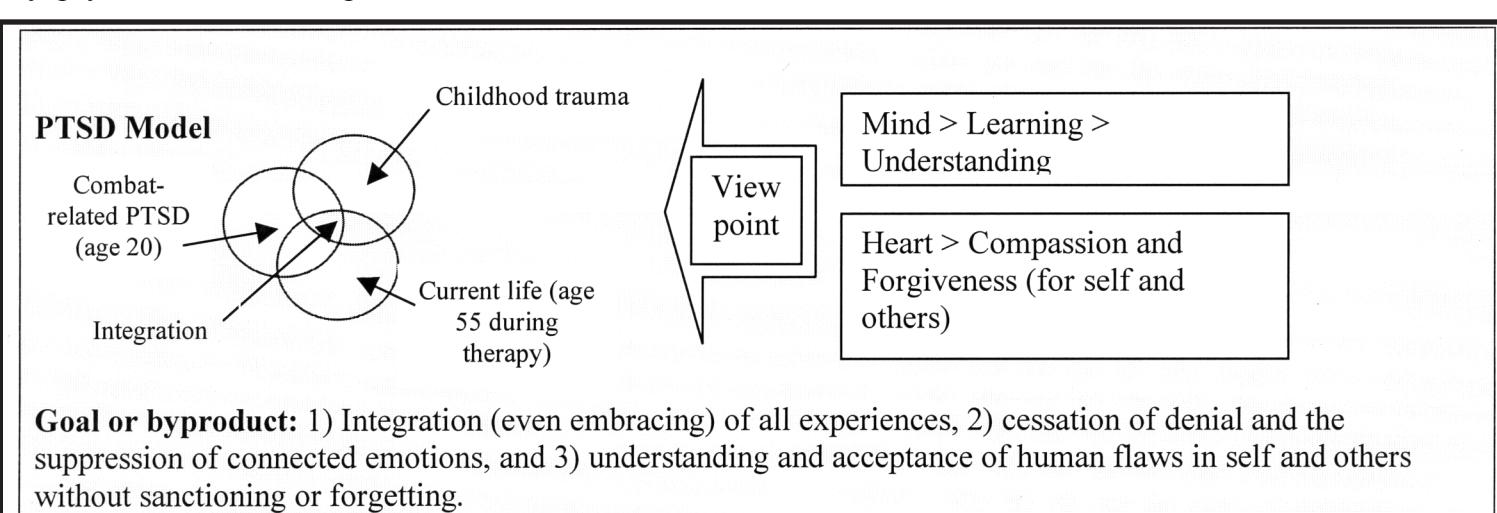
traumas had on me did I have the emotional maturity to forgive myself and others. Therapy has helped me with the lifelong process of integrating all of these experiences as being part of who I fully am, and to learn and grow from them.

**PTSD Model:** goal or byproduct: 1) Integration (even embracing) of all experiences, 2) cessation of denial and the suppression of connected emotions, and 3) understanding and acceptance of human flaws in self and others without sanctioning or forgetting.

I still suffer from PTSD but I have learned to better control it rather than be controlled by it. Most important to my healing process are the four decades of non-judgmental love, patience, compassion, and acceptance from my wife and daughter. They, along with our many family members and friends, opened their arms to me with a loving kindness that kept me on the path through the rich life I'm living.



*MICHAEL ORANGE IS AN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANT, AUTHOR OF FIRE IN THE HOLE: A MORTARMAN IN VIETNAM (WWW.AMAZON.COM), AND A LONG-TIME MEMBER OF VVAW.*



## Sgt. Israel Garcia Leaves Afghanistan

Home boy came home stiff.  
Not like his new widow's upper lip.  
"Fallen hero" said the local rag,  
not "another one in a body bag."  
Proud flag wavers hearts don't skip,  
knowing they'll never take that trip.

— Horace Coleman

## Strife and Life

Soldier momma's in Iraq.  
Athlete son's home in L.A.  
Neither is danger's stranger.  
Both are watchful prey in  
the war zones where they play.  
One will sleep for ever  
at the end of this day.  
A group defending its turf  
turns blood into red surf.  
Death's random breathe blew  
on the one who was the son.

— Horace Coleman

# Interview with Richard Stacewicz

KURT HILGENDORF

*To mark the release of Winter Soldiers: An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, VVAW member Kurt Hilgendorf sat down with author Richard Stacewicz.*

*Your book is an oral history. Why did you choose this method? And how does this fact differentiate it from other books on VVAW?*

When I started the project in 1992, I didn't intend for it to be an oral history. I knew after doing some preliminary research that there wasn't a lot of paper trail. This organization did not think of its legacy so they didn't save everything. There's stuff at the University of Wisconsin, there's stuff around that I went through, but it didn't reveal in great depth why certain decisions were made, why certain actions were taken, who actually decided these things. I knew I had to interview people. It was only through the process over the next few years of traveling around to various places interviewing people as I met them and then starting to transcribe them that I realized in the transcription process that their voices were much more powerful than anything I could write about what they said. The most powerful testimony they gave was in their own voices. At that point, about 1995-96 I decided that this made sense as an oral history. It's still much more powerful to actually read the words of people who experienced something than it is to read my analysis of it and then let the reader decide how they perceive what people have to say.

*Why aren't there more oral histories done?*

I'm a trained historian, and when I said that I would change it into an oral history, the first thing people said is that "that's not legitimate history" because what we rely on is documentation. "People's memories are faulty, how do you trust them, so you're not really doing history." The ironic thing is this is the way people have been chronicling their lives for thousands of years. Oral history is the first form. The Odyssey was spoken. Since at least the last 200 years in western culture, oral history is not seen as legitimate

history. As a historian, if you want to maintain your status as a historian within that community, to do it [oral history] is kind of risky because you are demeaned by others who don't see it as real history. But I didn't give a shit about that.

*The book came out in 1997, in an early limited run of about 5000 copies. There have been a lot of efforts over the last 10 years to get the book re-released. What was the process like?*

When it was originally released, I went with a small publisher, Twayne that specialized in part in oral history and we had a verbal agreement that once it came out in hard-cover it would come out in paperback. But then they were bought up by Simon and Schuster and then Prentice Hall and the book came out under the imprint of Prentice Hall. And they decided that they wouldn't put it out in paperback, along with hundreds of other authors. I spent the next few years trying to get the rights back, and got them back in 2002. I put out feelers in 2003, and was very close with South End Press in 2004. I held off looking for other groups, and it came down to the final vote. What it came down to was that they wouldn't put it out because they didn't do this kind of book, although several people wanted to start doing that kind of book. What happened was that Joe Miller made contact with Haymarket Books last year and then I followed up after he started the process, and we started the ball rolling. They were very happy to put it out.

*Was it poetic justice that the book came out with wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, with the urgency of people in an anti-war movement telling their anti-war story?*

Yeah there is a kind of poetic justice. The sad thing is that these adventures, these foreign interventions keep happening, so the book will be relevant for different periods of time. It works well with IVAW growing as it has been, and VVAW playing a critical role in that, there's a direct connection between the two organizations.

*What has changed between the*

*original book and the 10 years since, or is it the same thing?*

They [Haymarket] wanted it to be the same. What's changed with the book? Nothing. We're now embroiled in another lengthy war to dominate another region of the world. That's changed. It wasn't that way in 1998. People didn't think we were involved in that, even though there were sanctions on Iraq and we were still bombing them on a weekly basis. The vast majority of Americans are now unhappy with what's happening, even if they cannot pinpoint exactly what's going on. That's similar to what was happening 40 years ago. Hopefully it will raise questions.

*If you had to pick one story from the book that stands out as the essence of oral history, what would it be?*

What really matters to me, in history in general, is the human dimension, which often gets overlooked. How are people affected by these trends? You can talk about wars, you can talk about tactics, but really, when it comes down to it, how is that human being who's living on that side of the bombs experiencing it. Often we don't get that, and oral history gives us a peek into that, some idea how people were affected by these things. Most people aren't going to leave massive tomes and diaries that will explain what they're going through. The only way we can mine that information is by talking to people. There are a number of stories. The main thing that sticks out in my mind is someone like Dave Cline, who had doubts about why he was going, felt he had to go because it was his duty, and that's pervasive throughout the stories. People felt that even if they had doubts about it, this was something they had to do. Or they were gung ho, ready to go. I don't think I would've gotten that information from reading different texts. I wanted to get a sense of who these human beings were. What they felt, what they thought, what they believed they were going to do, and then to see the transformation take place.

Like with Dave Cline, it wasn't an immediate about face. It was a series of experiences that they had, in boot camp, and in the military

and returning finally that led them to rethink what they believed, not just about Vietnam but about their place in the world and what was happening in the United States. Oral history allowed me a glimpse into that that I don't think I could've gotten any other way. Those stories resonate with that same pattern of change that takes place. There were only a couple of people, like Pete Zastrow, who entered into the war thinking it was wrong. But most really wanted to believe. I think the most incredible thing, what really struck me about these guys, was the question of the war is over, you've survived, and you've done your duty. Why the hell are you now spending all your time protesting? It really speaks to their commitment that they had before going in, but that continues on afterward. They really wanted to believe they had this role to play and were meant to carry it through.

*Has your understanding of VVAW's history changed since the book came out? Has VVAW's work with IVAW, opposing the war in Iraq, VVAW's growth over the past few years – was that something that you would have foreseen? And did it change your perception of the organization?*

My perception of the organization hasn't changed. Frankly, when I started interviewing everyone, looking at the records, and the women involved, these people are incredible human beings who continue to do this stuff. I thought the organization was on its last legs. I thought I was going to compile the information of an organization that is no more, and at least like the Abraham Lincoln brigade there would be a record of them. I never thought that they'd rejuvenate in this way, especially now that 7 people in the book are now dead. Even before the book came out, people were dying, Jack McCloskey and John Kniffin and others. I thought "wow, I'm glad I captured some of their voices before the organization disappears." And here it is, they're back, they're working with IVAW. I think the war has brought back people who are Vietnam vets and had stopped their involvement in the movement. It's all positive. I

*continued on next page*

## Interview with Richard Stacewicz

*continued from previous page*

never would have guessed this.

*A lot of Vietnam vets talk in schools and give their stories of what they've seen and what they've done. How would an oral history or oral analysis of what's going on in Iraq be effective now and 10 years from now?*

I think it's effective because people who are young, 15 – 16 – 17, and possibly considering the military as a career, and I don't have anything against the military other than what they're made to do, need to hear from these folks who have been in. We're surrounded by propaganda about the glory of being in the military, especially young men. They need to hear other stories of people who have actually been there. That was actually one of the reasons I did this. I was teaching at the University of Illinois – Chicago when the first Gulf War broke out. It was the beginning of the semester, and I asked everyone in the class what they thought about the war. Most of the students in the class were for it. I started probing: "Why? What is it you that know about it? What is it that you feel about war in general?" A lot of the students, having grown up in the 80s, had grown up in an era when the whole historiography about Vietnam had changed dramatically. Vietnam was seen as a noble war but tactically flawed. The anti-war movement was a bunch of hippie, drug-using cowards. And I thought, "Wow, that really works. They grew up in this era when that was the dominant idea and it really works." Then I met Barry [Romo] and I thought, "I can try to inject this other voice of the veterans themselves so at least it will offer a challenge to the dominant ideology." That's what I think IVAW will do – they offer a challenge. We'll present this and hopefully people will get their hands on it and make decisions.

*Why do you think young people don't understand Vietnam?*

I think it's the education system, I think its culture, I think its film, and it's everything they've grown up in. The students I get now have no understanding of it. It's not that they can't, because once they do, they understand it much better and make the connections with

Iraq. But without that historical knowledge, it's like Howard Zinn says, "it's like you're born everyday."

*How do you see Vietnam vets' role in opposing the current war? Is there a unique role that Vietnam vets play in opposing a war like Iraq?*

I see them primarily as a great example to Iraq war vets and Afghan vets. They speak to those vets in ways that I can't and people who haven't been through that experience can't. They have legitimacy in the eyes of current veterans coming back. Playing that role of working with them, helping them out is the key. I think Vietnam is so far away in young people's minds today that I'm not sure they can speak to a larger audience who would take them seriously.

*You had an opportunity to go to Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan. What were your impressions of that action and how do you view the current generation of Winter Soldiers related to the previous generation of Winter Soldiers?*

I see the current generation of Winter Soldiers in a much more difficult circumstance. Vietnam Vets Against the War was formed at a time when there was a great dissatisfaction with the war, there was a strong civilian anti-war movement both here and internationally, that supported them, that they could feed off of. Within the military, there was a great deal of resistance growing. There was a cycle of the civilian anti-war movement, the vets, and then within the military the military resistance that all fed off each other. I don't see that right now. One of the biggest reasons is that there's no draft. Everyone in the military now is a "volunteer." They have financial restrictions that prevent them from resisting, from speaking out. There is a whole culture of the military that has been segregated from the civilian population in a way that didn't exist 40 years ago, that makes it much more difficult to go against people who they may be very close to. I think it was great for them [IVAW] to get together. Now the main point is to keep

on working, and actually make more and more in-roads into the military.

*Do you see the possibility that there will be a shift in military policy as Iraq carries on, to where the resistance will grow?*

Realistically, depending on where you start our involvement in Vietnam, but if you go back to 1956 to advisory stage, or 1963 with the big troop buildup, it took 4-5 years to coalesce and to really get this organization [VVAW] moving. It's happened just as quickly if not more so now. So now it depends on if whether or not we'll continue dragging this [war] out, if the organization keeps growing. There is disaffection. All the polls show among troops that they don't like stop-loss and don't want to be there. The atmosphere is similar, but they're not serving one-year terms and coming back. That's the main difference. They're in for a much-longer time and resistance is much more difficult than 40 years ago. But nothing's impossible.

*We spoke earlier of Dave Cline, someone who did GI resistance and organizing when he came back – are stories like his, a regular guy who came back more*

*powerful than someone's like John Kerry's who had access to power and prestige and upward aspirations?*

Much more powerful to the audience I was looking for. I was looking for it to be a high school/college audience of young people who often feel powerless. But to see someone like Dave Cline, Barry Romo, Jack McCloskey, all these guys who were working class guys who can have such an impact on really changing the course of history. They can actually be causes of changes and not just be buffeted around.

Sometimes I'll Xerox a few pages from the book and have students read them. The reaction when young people read some of the voices is pretty powerful. I've seen some people really begin to question some of their own ideas. These are people who they can relate to. They're the same people. That's what's most important to me. If it does get picked up and people read it that it has that same kind of effect.



**KURT HILGENDORF IS A SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER AT JOHN HOPE COLLEGE PREP HIGH SCHOOL IN CHICAGO AND A MEMBER OF VVAW NATIONAL STAFF.**



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If you need a speaker for an event or class visit or someone to interview, please contact the person nearest you.

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# SECTION B

## The Veteran

Volume 38, Number 2

Fall 2008

### Getting on the Bus for Justice

KIM SCIPES

*Reprinted from Substance, an education policy newspaper in Chicago.*

April 2008

0 Dark 30 (oh-dark-thirty): military slang for very early in the morning. I remembered it as I delivered my wife, Hans Buwalda, to the Midwest regional office of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) at Diversey and Kimball in Chicago at 12:30 am on March 13, 2008.

Hans was traveling with about 40 veterans from the Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo wars (and other places around the world), plus spouses and partners, to participate in the Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan hearings at the National Labor College in Silver Spring, Maryland. Some of the men and women were planning to testify publicly about what they did or personally witnessed while in-country; others would testify privately, not being ready to speak in front of an audience. Others

were going along to provide emotional support. And my wife, a psychotherapist on the Mental Health Team, was riding the bus and going to help provide clinical and general support for any person who needed it throughout the four days and three nights of the hearings.

We arrived and went up into the office. Vets from the current wars were hanging around, warily eying newcomers such as myself, although I soon found a number of folks that I knew. All were tired, all seemed excited: like almost any military operation, there is a tension that builds before things jump off. What were they getting into?

These were mostly men and women who had served in the US military in Iraq and Afghanistan; a number had seen combat. Some had killed; some had been wounded; some had seen friends die; and all had suffered in one way or the other: yet each had survived, and they were determined to speak truth to power. An unlikely

band of heroes. Yet, IVAW is an international organization, with almost 800 members at the time of the hearings—and over 1,000 subsequently; all men and women who had served in the US military since September 11, 2001. (See [www.ivaw.org](http://www.ivaw.org).)

The 2008 Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan hearings took place at the National Labor College. Use of this facility had been arranged with the help of US Labor Against War, a national organization of trade unionists and their unions who have been leading the fight within Labor to get the AFL-CIO to actively oppose Bush's war.

The hearings were comprised of a series of panels, beginning Friday night and concluding on Sunday. In each panel, there were a number of speakers, sometimes including civilians as well as military. There were panels on the history of resistance in the US military, with a discussion of the Vietnam experience, as well as reports on the impact of

the war on military families, the misuse of the military in collecting Americans' phone conversations through satellite operations since 9/11, and the terrible mistreatment of many veterans by the Veterans Administration. There was also a panel on the future of resistance in the military.

Yet for this observer—who watched the IVAW.org live stream from Chicago—the heart of the hearings were a series of panels on the "Rules of Engagement," "Institutionalized Sexism in the Military," and "Dehumanization of Iraqis and US Forces." Each of these panels had five or more veterans testifying about their experiences.

The "Rules of Engagement" (ROE) are the military's way of limiting force to the minimum necessary to achieve their "mission"—or that's at least the rationale. In reality, while some units limit their destruction, the ROE are often used by the military

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IVAW with Distress Flag marching at the Republican National Convention in St. Paul, August 2008

## Getting on the Bus for Justice

*continued from previous page*

to cover their ass in case there are any questions asked.

Yet, as the vets testified, no matter how honest the ROE were when they arrived, over time, they degenerated to where many troops basically had a license to kill. And they did.

The anguish in these vets' voices, their stories and their body language, were proof positive that no matter how much they had believed in the mission—they had been told they were going there to help the people of Iraq and Afghanistan, supposedly protecting our country—they had seen and done things that they could never forget.

For US troops, one of the differences between Iraq and Vietnam are the considerable number of women in the ranks. Even though women are not supposed to see combat, the nature of guerilla warfare, and especially urban guerrilla warfare, breaks down artificial barriers. Women are not confined to safe situations, far behind the lines; many are exposed to enemy attacks, and the ever-present risk of mortars and IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices) in the roads. A number of female soldiers and Marines have been killed.

And yet, for a number of testifiers, the institutionalized sexism of the US military played an essential role in the training of both males and females. The worst thing that any male could be called was a "wuss," cause that meant he showed emotion and/or weakness: having compassion or concern about victims might get him to think about what he was really doing. And yet, this also came around, as many women have been subjected to sexual harassment, faced improper sexual come-ons, and even rape from their male "comrades." In some cases, women expressed more fear of their male peers than they did of the enemy: for example, women cut down on liquid consumption towards the end of the day, endangering their health in the heat, so they wouldn't have to venture toward the latrines after dark; and many, when they had to go, carried their bayonets to protect them from assault by male troops.

This dehumanization of American troops—cause that's what really it is—in turn, got taken out on Iraqi and Afghani

civilians. The racist term "hadji" was used constantly: Iraqis and Afghanis were treated as sub-human, so any violence against them was "understandable." (Commonalities with usage of the terms "gook" or "nigger" are intentional.) Of course, our troops were to abide by the stated Rules of Engagement, unless they considered themselves threatened—and then all restrictions were off. And in an environment where our troops are not wanted, where the threat to their lives was ever-present, and where stress is the usual state of affairs, it took very little to feel threatened.

The stories are much more poignant than this writer can adequately convey, so I've not picked out quotes to illustrate. Others have done that, and often well. I would rather encourage readers to go to the IVAW website—again, [www.ivaw.org](http://www.ivaw.org)—and watch the archived presentations by the men and women who served, and their supporters. Some of the stories are extremely painful, and there are some gruesome (aka real) pictures as well, so they are best viewed with friends—and not when one is feeling vulnerable.

There are two other things that need to be considered that were very innovative. IVAW had done some incredibly good outreach to the media, seeking the widest coverage possible.

These hearings were broadcast and reported around the world, including by internationally known outlets such as the BBC (*British Broadcasting Company*), Agence French Press, and the "Arab CNN," Al-Jazeera, so people around the world learned about these hearings. Surprisingly, media oriented toward the US military provided considerable coverage, with articles appearing in the *Air Force*, *Army*, *Marine* and *Navy Times*, as well as the daily international military paper, *Stars and Stripes*. (IVAW has been subsequently contacted by troops currently on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan.)

The hearings were also carried extensively by alternative media in the US, with live gavel-to-gavel coverage, and excellent commentary by a range of very professional media personnel. The entire set of hearings were streamed live by IVAW, and were

also broadcast live by KPFA over the *Pacifica Radio Network* and live over *Free Speech TV*, as well as with reports on a wide range of alternative media programs such as *Democracy Now!* Michael Moore has been very supportive, posting many items on his web site ([www.michaelmoore.com](http://www.michaelmoore.com)), and there have been excellent reports in *The Progressive*, *In These Times*, Z, *The Nation*, and *Alternet*, plus powerful videos on Z Net and *The Nation's* web site. (See Jeff Cohen's article on Winter Soldier and the alternative media at [www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com)) It would be hard to imagine a more professional effort, and there will be continuing stories published in the coming time period.

Yet, with few exceptions, there was one glaring shortcoming in the media coverage: the mainstream media outlets in the United States, both print and television, refused to cover the hearings.

To my way of thinking, there is something wrong when a serious set of hearings—focusing on the behavior of US troops acting in our name—that is made available to people around the world and yet is not made available to most Americans. This seems very anti-democratic to me. It also seems as though there is a conscious effort being made to manipulate the US public by refusing to provide essential information that challenges the "mainstream" positions on the war.

And finally, a few words on the mental health aspects to the hearings. Many of those testifying suffer from PTSD, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and there was a serious risk that testifying—or even participating in the hearings—would release the demons locked in people's memories. IVAW—and here my wife gets credit for arguing the need for mental health services, before, during and after the hearings for all participants (including members of the media while on-site)—made a major effort to ensure people's safety and well-being.

I'm not sure about other regions of the country, but in the Great Lakes and Great Plains regions, potential testifiers were checked to see if they had mental health support or, if they didn't have it, they were linked to providers before the hearings. As far as I know, every vet who responded to these efforts had such support—and extensive efforts were made to get vets to respond.

These services were provided by mental health volunteers in the local areas.

At the hearings themselves, each publicly testifying vet had a "home battle buddy," a veteran present to provide peer-counseling support throughout the entire proceedings. (Vietnam Veterans Against the War—VVAW—provided security throughout the hearings, supporting their IVAW brothers and sisters.) Additionally, there were licensed clinicians on site 24 hours a day, throughout the testimony to give support to those testifying, other veterans, as well as those in the audience, including spouses and significant others, as well as media people covering the event. All kinds of people availed themselves of these on-site services.

Additionally, each veteran in this region who testified has been contacted after getting home, to make sure they are hooked up with a local mental health provider if needed and/or getting whatever support they need. Some have been speaking and organizing against the war since their return, getting their mental health back through political activity.

When they returned to the Midwest, these vets and their supporters were both exhausted and exhilarated. These folks had pulled off a major operation to undercut the war effort, bringing veterans from around the country to DC, helping to build opposition to Bush and the Democrats' ongoing wars.

I can think of no better way to "support the troops" than by at least listening to them. Hear their stories, feel their pain—and then get off your butt and work to ensure IVAW's points of unity are attained: (1) pull the troops out now; (2) provide full medical and psychological services to all who served, regardless of military discharge given; and (3) pay reparations and help rebuild Iraq!




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KIM SCIPES, PH.D., SERVED IN THE US MARINE CORPS FROM 1969-73, ATTAINING THE RANK OF SERGEANT AND RECEIVING AN HONORABLE DISCHARGE. HE CURRENTLY WORKS AS AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY AT PURDUE UNIVERSITY NORTH CENTRAL IN WESTVILLE, IN. HE, HIS WIFE, DAUGHTER AND SON LIVE IN LOGAN SQUARE NEIGHBORHOOD IN CHICAGO.

## Lost and Found

SIMI LINTON

On a spring day in 1971, my husband, my best friend and I set off from Boston, bound for Washington, DC. We walked down the street together, we stood near the entrance to the Mass Pike, and in unison we thrust our thumbs out, looking for a ride. With each ride we got closer to Washington, but we never got there, and by the end of the day, my friend Carol was dead and my husband John, the ferociously smart man I'd married much too young, was in a coma he would never wake up from. I lay down the hall from him, tethered to tubes and machines, breathing hard to keep myself alive.

We had been on our way to Washington to protest the war in Vietnam. This was the demonstration that would end the war and we must voice our outrage. We all knew of men who had been killed, and of those who were wounded and wouldn't ever walk again, or hear again, or breathe properly. We were moved to go to that demonstration because it was spearheaded by returning vets. Angry at US policy and disillusioned by the reality of what they had witnessed, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War wanted the United States to know that they no longer believed this was a just war.

I sustained an injury to my spine that immobilized my legs, spent months in the hospital and then more months in a rehab center, learning to use a wheelchair and learning to cope with the world in this new state I found myself in.

The first day there, five or six young women and men, all in

wheelchairs, came rolling into my room to greet me. "When will you get your chair?" someone asked, like it was something I should want.

They soon left, talking loud, kidding around. Two guys tried to push their chairs out the door at the same time so they crashed into each other. "Fuck you," said one. "No, fuck you," said the other. I was left alone, wanting to be part of the group, wanting to move. I got the wheelchair, but it took a while to catch up to the others. Slowly I began to gain strength, move around a bit, and eat. Thick milkshakes, bread and butter, mashed potatoes. Treats were shared with roommates. We made each event in this sorry place as festive as possible. We were thrown in together and exposed in all that was sad and messy about our lives at that time. Our piss and our shit, our tears and our awkward visits with people who didn't know how to talk to us.

I often brushed off people's kindness to me, showing an upbeat face, saying I was fine, no need to worry. But not always. My friend Kevin found me one day huddled in a vestibule outside the urologist's office, crying. A few weeks before, they had taken out my indwelling catheter, and I was trying hard to keep from peeing all over myself, but I couldn't hold back and there I was again, wet and sad. "Kevin," I sobbed "he told me that maybe it would get better, but if not I could wear a pad when I went out. I can't do that."

Kevin said "Yeah," and pointed to the bulge in his pants leg where, as we both knew, there

was a tube coming out of his penis, running down his leg, into a bag strapped to his ankle. But it was Kevin's turn to comfort me, and before long we were laughing at how much beer he'd drunk the night before to make his bag so fat.

I slowly got stronger, learned how to use my chair and began making friends. We would race through the hallways, go to the snack bar - do anything just to move. On hot summer nights, we snuck bottles of scotch up to the roof, and some of us smoked reefer.

In all that craziness, I recognized that something serious had happened to me and I was starting to feel like a more substantial person. A woman now, although no longer a married woman and no longer a walking woman, I was, mercifully, no longer a girl. All the people who visited me since the accident had been told about it by someone else, but there was one friend who didn't know. One night, after everyone was in bed, I took a bunch of change down to the phone booth at the end of the hall and called Delia. I just plunged in and told her about the accident, about John and Carol, the plan to leave the hospital soon, stay on in New York and go back to college.

I then said, "I'm OK, you know."

"What?" she said, letting out a gasp, "Oh yeah, sure you're fine. John is dead. You're fucking paralyzed, you're in a fucking wheelchair, what do you mean, you're OK?"

"But I am," I said.



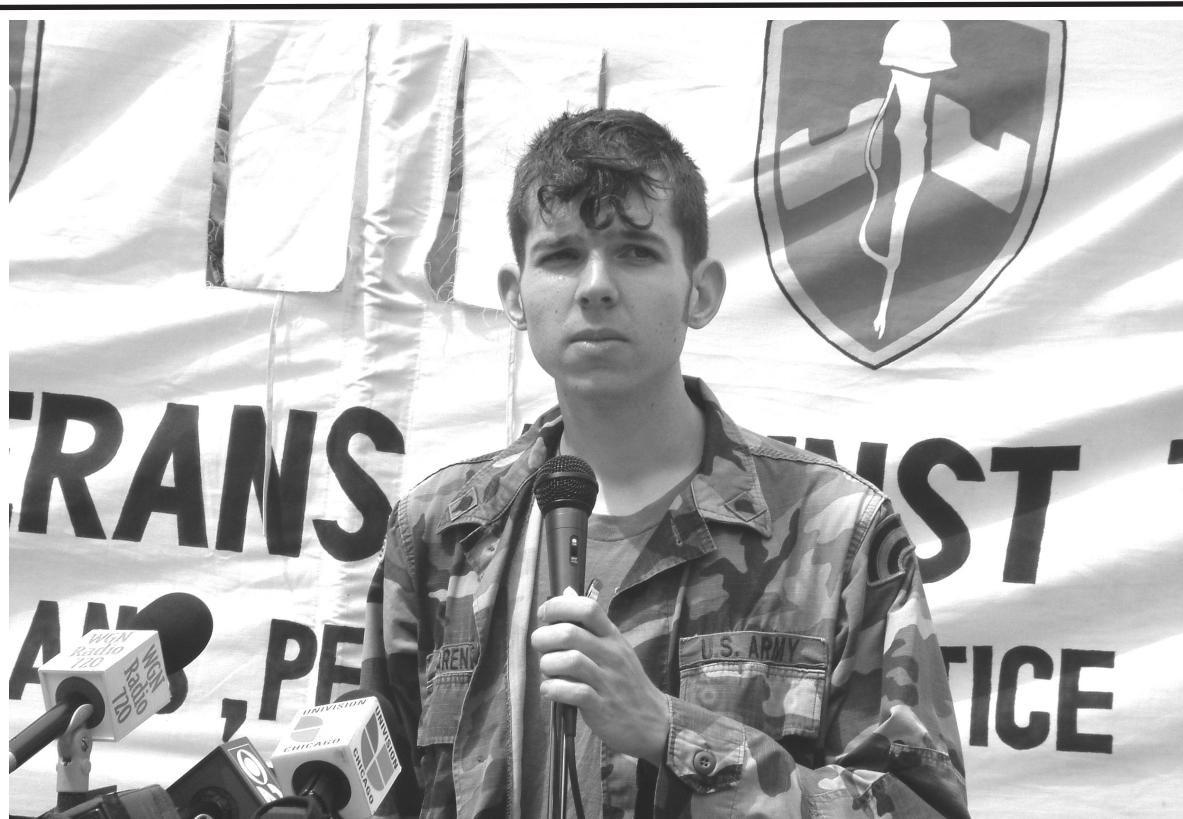
I woke from the nightmares, lived on the edge for a while, frail and hurting, dopey from rounds of painkillers and the numbing bleakness of hospital life. There were lumps and bumps and scars. But now, a few months later, I liked the same things, got outraged just the same, laughed at my sister's jokes, and still hated Nixon. I was scared of going back out into the world, a world I knew would not treat me well, but I was hungry for it.

I laughed when Delia said "You're fucking paralyzed!" Everyone had been so nice, so tentative, like maybe I didn't know what had happened to me.

If Delia could talk rough to me, I must be OK.



*SIMI LINTON IS A WRITER AND FILMMAKER. *LOST AND FOUND* IS FROM HER MEMOIR *MY BODY POLITIC* (UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN PRESS, 2006). SHE IS AUTHOR OF *CLAIMING DISABILITY: KNOWLEDGE AND IDENTITY, AND ARTICLES ON DISABILITY RIGHTS AND CULTURE*. SHE IS CO-PRODUCER AND DIRECTOR OF THE FORTHCOMING DOCUMENTARY FILM, *INVITATION TO DANCE*. [WWW.SIMILINTON.COM](http://WWW.SIMILINTON.COM)*



Christopher Arendt at Memorial Day in Chicago, 2008

## Recollections of Gainesville

BILL SHUNAS

During the Vietnam War, the anti-war movement came under attack by the government. The attacks took different forms, one of which was to use the criminal Justice system to prosecute anti-war protesters, often targeting leaders of the Movement. The most famous was the Chicago Seven (eight). Other trials of this kind took place around the country including cities like Camden, NJ, Harrisburg, PA, Seattle, WA, and others. The government also came after VVAW when eight members, including four regional co-ordinators were arrested and charged with conspiracy to disrupt the 1972 Republican National Convention in Miami. The Gainesville Eight were John Briggs, Scott Camil, Alton Foss, John Kniffin, Pete Mahoney, Stan Mickelsen, Bill Patterson and Don Perdue.

The trial took place in Gainesville, Florida during the summer of 1973. The Gainesville Eight had a defense committee that consisted of lawyers, family and friends. Also in Gainesville was a group, including myself, who were there for two purposes. We were to organize activities like courthouse vigils, street theater and finally a major demonstration on the Saturday before the trial. Our second mission was as a press office to give the VVAW spin during these events and the course of the trial. We called ourselves the Gainesville Eight News Bureau. For legal reasons we operated separately from the Gainesville Eight Defense Committee. What follows is remembrances of my experiences.

I drove down to Florida with the late Walter Klim several weeks before the trial. It so happened that there was a pre-trial hearing to be held in Pensacola, Florida so we headed there first.

The National Office of VVAW had printed up an issue of the *Winter Soldier* (predecessor to *The Veteran*) and asked us to bring several bundles to Florida to be distributed during the course of the coming events. The headline of that issue read "Come To Gainesville - Live the American Revolution."

"Man, this is bizarre," said Walter as we drove through Tennessee. "Two northerners driving through the South with a trunk full of newspapers saying 'Live the American

Revolution'."

I was relatively new to VVAW. Walter had better antenna for these kind of things. These were times when you needed to watch your back. VVAW was finding police infiltrators among its ranks around the country. That would be highlighted at the upcoming trial. Movement people were always targets of the right wingers and the government as we would soon see. And now we were in the New South which was still like the Old South. We didn't expect to be welcomed.

Hours later, Walter said, "This is fucking crazy. We're driving through Alabama with a trunk full of newspapers saying, 'Live the American Revolution'." Relax, Walter.

We made it to Pensacola without incident, found the courthouse, the courtroom and slipped into the back row to watch. This pre-trial hearing was being held in Pensacola instead of Gainesville because Judge Winston Arnow and chief prosecutor, Guy Goodwin - a pair who worked together for the entire trial - said they were afraid there would be undue publicity if it was held in Gainesville.

I had read a tiny bit about Star Chamber proceedings in the British court system. They were held in secret, and the accused was badgered and maybe tortured before being found guilty. It was an arbitrary, unjust and inquisitional procedure that was abolished 332 years before the Gainesville Eight trial. But sitting in Winston Arnow's court, you'd never know it was gone.

One of the issues in this pre-trial hearing was the role of VVAW in speaking out about the trial and having demonstrations and so forth. Goodwin, supported by Arnow, felt this would prejudice the case against the government. The Gainesville Eight attorney wanted to show that VVAW and the defense committee were separate entities, so that whatever was said or done by VVAW was not the defendants trying to influence the outcome of the trial.

To make this point the Gainesville Eight attorney called VVAW coordinator Brian Adams to testify. Brian duly testified that VVAW would act independently of the defense committee, using our right to comment freely on the case.

Then it came time for prosecutor Goodwin to cross-examine Brian, and that's when things turned dark and menacing. On TV, courtroom scenes require that cross-examination have something to do with the original testimony. Not here. This was inquisition from both Goodwin and Arnow.

Tell me, comes the stern voice, who are the people who are here to plan these events. Adams fumbles for words. The defense attorney objects. Arnow shoots him down. Says, "I want to hear this." More objections are made during this sequence, but they are ignored. Arnow wants to get to the bottom of this conspiracy. Answer the questions. Brian hesitates, says he doesn't understand the question. Names, says Goodwin. Uh, says Adams, there's Walter Klim and Bill Shunas. Walter and I sink low in our back bench, letting out a silent groan. How many eyes are looking at us? I've been in VVAW less than a year and already I'm an Enemy of the State.

And the voices thunder at Adams. Who else. Tell me the names. Brian searches for words. What others they want to know. Nobody in the room moves a muscle. We are barely breathing. Tell me who, Arnow demands. Give us the names, Goodwin demands. Brian finally says that other VVAW members will be coming. Who are they is demanded. Some VVAW members, Brian says. Who? He doesn't answer. They take turns yelling at him. Finally, in the midst of this brooding drama a courageous soul from the Defense Committee stands

up and yells. I don't remember exactly, but I think all he said was, "Stop!" Then all the Gainesville Eight and their supporters stand and start shouting. Arnow and Goodwin are stopped in their tracks. Arnow calls for order which doesn't happen. A recess is called. I breathe again. My shirt is soaked with sweat. When the court reassembles, Adams is off the witness stand, and the court returns to the twentieth century - or maybe the nineteenth.

Walter and I leave out of Pensacola. "Mother fucker Winston Arnow and that Guy Goodwin made us a target," says Walter. I'm beginning to see his point. Now we've got over three hundred miles to Gainesville. Through the South.

Two northerners. With a trunk full of newspapers with a headline that says "Live the American Revolution."

In Gainesville finally we are among friends. We rent a house in a low rent district near the courthouse and across the street from the *Gainesville Sun*, the town's main newspaper. To prepare the home for occupancy we closed all the windows, set off bug bombs inside, and didn't return for three days at which time we swept out a couple of thousand cockroach corpses. We were ready to go.

VVAW members began to arrive to help make preparations for the demonstrations and the other events. Then Winston Arnow struck again. We would not be permitted to speak on behalf of the Gainesville eight. We would be impeding justice. The gag order applied to any person who was in concert with the Gainesville Eight. We would hear those words often over the next few weeks. "In concert."

We had a meeting the evening of the day that Arnow issued the gag order. That was one of the heaviest things I ever experienced. We felt the power of the State had come down upon us. It was doom and gloom.

There must have been twelve or fifteen of us at this meeting. We came to the conclusion that we had to challenge the gag order. We would say that we were not "in concert" with the Gainesville Eight. We were only exercising our right to free speech. Then came the heavy part - deciding to go to jail.

We would call a press conference the next day. One person and one person only would speak out. After he was arrested, a press conference would be called the following day for a second person to speak. This would go on until all of us were in jail. At the end of the meeting we established the order in which we would speak out and go to jail. Bart Savage of the National Office would go first, followed by the regional coordinators and the chapter coordinators. I felt fortunate that I had no title. I would have ten or twelve more days of freedom.

The next day we called a press conference. The press came. Bart spoke. He spoke

*continued on next page*

## Recollections of Gainesville

*continued from previous page*

about the trial and the gag order and said we'd continue to speak out. We weren't disrupting the trial or acting in concert with the defendants. Nothing happened. Nothing happened the next day. No arrests. Winston Arnow had backed down. We went back to organizing.

We had decided to reach out to the community to build support, to build for the demonstration, and to counter government claims that we were dangerous and in Gainesville to disrupt. My job at this time was to arrange speaking gigs and talk to community organizations churches, students and so forth.

One of the ironies of the situation happened when I got the idea to visit the President of the Chamber of Commerce to reassure the local establishment of our peaceful intentions during the upcoming week. This man was very, very nice to me. He was very, very polite. And he very, very much did not want to engage in dialog with me. And I thought this was very, very strange. When the trial began a few days later his wife was in the jury pool, was chosen to be on the jury and chosen to be the jury foreperson. I've always wondered if that explained my strange conversation with him.

Back in those times the anti-war movement or Movement consisted of two kinds of people. There were those who had a political take on the war and everything else. And then there were those who simply wanted to be part of the Counter Culture. Really, everyone was a combination of the two strains of thought even if it went 90%-10%. One way or the other I was amused during the week prior to our planned demonstration when we did set up a camp in the boonies outside of Gainesville as a place to stay for people coming to the demonstration. I would give directions to the camp in which I told people that when they reached a certain intersection they should go straight and would find the camp. For that I was reprimanded more than once. "Go forward, man. Don't go straight." Alas.

In the five days before the demonstration VVAW members fanned out into the community, passing out leaflets about the trial and the winding down, but still unfinished war in Vietnam and Cambodia. A couple thousand

would come for that Saturday demonstration, and there would be a silent march of four hundred to the courthouse. At the rally there would be three speakers: Tom Hayden, an anti-war activist and member of the Chicago Seven; Virginia Collins from the Republic of New Africa and Tony Russo who along with Daniel Ellsberg had released the *Pentagon Papers*. Providing the music would be long time activist and folk singer Pete Seeger.

As it happened I got the best assignment. I had to pick up Pete Seeger at the Jacksonville airport. The airport at Jacksonville was 55 minutes away. I would be alone with America's legendary folk and protest singer for 55 minutes. What great conversation we would have.

The time came. I headed for Jacksonville and found Pete at his gate. I threw his bag and guitar in the trunk, headed for the parking lot exit, paid the fee and turned toward him with my first question and - Pete Seeger was asleep. Every few minutes I glanced over to the passenger seat. Pete Seeger was asleep. Fifty-five minutes later we arrived at his quarters. I woke him up, and he was very appreciative of the ride. So much for our conversation. For those who are interested. Pete Seeger snores. Not too loudly.

The day came for the march and rally. One of life's lessons came here. It came from Tony Russo's speech. We had been dancing around Winston Arnow's gag order, saying, no, we weren't the folks "in concert" with the Gainesville Eight. We were just ordinary VVAW folk exercising our first amendment rights and not causing any trouble.

Tony Russo got up to speak, and the first words out of his mouth were, "I ... am ... in ... concert ... with the Gainesville Eight." There it was. All our hemming and hawing was really bullshit. If you're going to be involved in something like this, you don't go halfway in.

If what I have written suggests that there was some paranoia among Movement people of that time, that's because there was. Jail and health problems and occasionally even death were not out of the question. But it was more than that. It was the feeling that the power of the government was

too relentless. During the trial the defense was given a room where the defendants and their lawyers and friends could gather and retreat to during breaks. On the first day of the trial they discovered a couple of FBI agents with recording equipment in a broom closet in the defendants' room. Why was anyone surprised?

As the trial proceeded the government called witness after witness who prior to their court appearance were thought to have been friends. Some were VVAW members who had really been police informants. It was the times. Back then it was less sophisticated. No stealing of e-mail or picking up cell phone conversations. It was simple things like phone taps. Crude, too. On one occasion I picked up the phone to make a call. No dial tone. It sounded like a live phone. "Hello," I said. "Hello," was the answer. "I'd like to make a call," I said. "Oh," he said. And then I got my dial tone. Nice agent.

We settled into a routine once the trial started. There were five of us in the Gainesville Eight News Bureau. Two or more would go to court each day, take notes, come back to our office, hand out a press release and talk to the press. We still operated separate from the Defense committee, following Winston Arnow's orders. The trial fell into a routine. One day the government would bring out a witness who's spectacular testimony would be somewhere between exaggeration and straight out lie. The next day the defense would cross examine and expose lies.

During this time I had one more encounter with a Movement folk singer. It was a Thursday night when I got the phone call. It was Phil Ochs. He was in Miami, flying to New York. He'd stop in Gainesville and do a concert on Saturday if we'd just pay the difference he'd be charged for the added stop. I didn't know what to say. How can you organize a concert in a day and a half? So I told him, "Sure."

We couldn't find a place to hold a concert at the last minute so we got permission from the *Gainesville Sun* newspaper, and held the concert in their parking lot, passing out leaflets to try and attract a crowd. It was pathetic and embarrassing. Fortunately, Phil Ochs was a nice man. He arrived about three hours early. And fortunately he liked cheap cigars and beer of which we had

a good supply. Then he went out and gave a helluva concert for the handful of people who came.

After a few weeks the trial was turned over to the jury. I believe this was on a Thursday or a Friday. In either case, it was expected that the jury wouldn't reach a verdict until the following week. So we decided to have a trial's end demonstration that weekend. I went to police headquarters downtown to get the demonstration permit. While I was filling out the form, the sergeant came in and told me to forget it. More bullshit, I thought. I started my protest, but he caught me short. "It's over." The jury had come back in four hours. Not guilty. No need to demonstrate. Elsewhere in Gainesville, friends were hugging each other. Me? I'm with six cops. I made the party that night.

The jury had actually made the decision in an hour and a half and then played with a slingshot that was a prosecution exhibit. (The Gainesville Eight were supposedly going to attack the Republicans with slingshots.) The victory was sweet. The Eight were free and VVAW was vindicated. It was not without cost to the organization. Organizing in the South had more or less stopped. The trial cost the organization much money. Alton Foss told me that the lawyers told him that the government had 24 more witnesses they hadn't called. Presumably these would be more friends. They could be anyone. He couldn't trust anyone any more. Paranoia still ruled.

During that summer, John and Cathy Kniffin's cat had a litter. By the end of the trial the kittens were weaned, and John and Cathy were kind enough to give one to me. One of John's heroes was Emiliano Zapata, the Mexican revolutionary hero who sacrificed his all for his people. His followers affectionately called him Miliano. So that's what I named the kitten. Walter had left Gainesville a few days before me. So it was only me and Miliano that drove back to Chicago. It had been a stressful few months, and it didn't feel like I had lived the American Revolution. Got to swat a few fascists, though.




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BILL SHUNAS IS A VIETNAM VETERAN, AUTHOR AND VVAW MEMBER IN THE CHICAGO CHAPTER.

# Have Courage, We Will Win

LT. EHREN WATADA

*A speech from "He Stood Up: The Mistrial of Lt. Ehren Watada" by Pepperspray Productions (1.27.7, Langston Hughes Center, Seattle, WA)*

*"It's each small act that we commit that gives us hope, those little gifts of the present." - Howard Zinn*

I think I can honestly say that I am surrounded by greatness, because I am surrounded by my brother and sister Americans who are here, and willing to take the first step toward making our country better.

In opposition to my position, the argument will be made that soldiers don't have a right to pick and choose their wars.

I would respond that it is not only our right, but our constitutional and moral duty.

Many seem to forget that service members swear loyalty; not to one man or institution, but to its country and its people.

We don't swear to fight in wars, or just 'do our job,' nor blindly obey orders, but to protect the promise, principles and laws of this country at all costs.

My intent is never to disparage the military or to dishonor the sacrifices of troops in the past or present.

Instead, I want to show you, my fellow Americans, that while we focus on the minute issue of whether Lt. Watada is legally right or wrong, this country is falling apart around us.

Sixty-six percent of the 300 million people in this country believe the war to be wrong, yet what are they doing to sacrifice something of themselves to stop it?

Our own government has concluded that the mere presence of American troops in Iraq is making America less safe to terrorism.

Eighty to ninety percent of Iraqis -- Eighty to ninety percent of Iraqis -- want us to withdraw completely within 6 months.

Their overall opinion is that our mere presence is exacerbating the sectarian warfare.

We ignore the voices of the people, yet we claim to want democracy for Iraqis.

We aren't there to protect America we aren't there to protect Iraqis; why are we there? [Oil]

Why are young Americans dying in the sands of Iraq? [Oil.]

Why are we dictating to a 2,000-year-old civilization how they should live or what's best for them? [Oil; Because Bush is a moron]

We are all being used for the profit and pride of a few within our society, and we are all paying for it in blood and treasure.

As for my imminent prosecution, it is the right and duty of every service member to refuse unlawful orders.

I would not be given a fair trial in any sense of the word.

The military shields itself with the law, based on technicalities, rather than justice.

I would not be allowed any defense to prove the order to conduct combat operations in Iraq is unlawful.

Even if a heavily biased jury, made up of career officers, could ever conceive of sympathizing with me, I would not be given my god-given right to due process.

You will be told the policies of the administration and the order to go to war are political questions, and not for a junior officer to consider.

Then who is deciding the political question? An undecided Congress? An apathetic public, without a personal stake? Or an administration who committed the alleged crime of deception in the first place?

In Nazi Germany, atrocities and wars of aggression against Poland and the Czech Republic were enabled, because very few were willing to stand up.

When they did, German prosecutors and judges used the very same arguments against them, insisting that the policies of war were for Hitler and the Nazi party to decide, and no one else.

There is no excuse when wrongs are being committed in our name, and when we are asked to willingly and silently, have a hand in these crimes.

I ask of you: What is the real threat to our society, our democracy and our freedom; the things that ensure a law-abiding and functioning military?

Is it the refusal of an officer who tried many times to avoid a confrontation with the military? Or is it the over-arching principles and policies of our current administration?

Remember, over the past six years, many things have taken place.

The violation of the Fourth Amendment by wiretapping international phone calls of American citizens without court-approved warrants or congressional oversight.

110 signing statements on bills, excluding the president from abiding to the law, to include the Anti-Torture Bill.

- The 2006 Military Commissions Act, which among other things retroactively indemnifies administration officials from prosecution under the 1996 War Crimes Act;

- Strips citizens and non-citizens alike of habeas corpus;

- Grants the present sole authority to determine who is an enemy combatant;

- Allows the establishment of military tribunals in which hearsay, coerced testimony and secret evidence can be used against detainees;

- Has allowed the systematic practice of torture, vague definitions of POWs leading to widespread abuse; indefinite incarceration without charge or representation; illegal renditions, establishment of secret prisons, and extraditions to countries known to use torture;

The violation of the Constitution by manipulation of data, false and misleading statements and material admissions to gain public support and authorization from Congress to wage war.

There are so many injustices that have been committed by this administration.

Excluding all these other actions, the Iraq war, itself founded by defrauding the American people, has had the most devastating and obvious effects.

It has caused an estimated 600,000 Iraqi deaths.

This is compounded with debilitating sanctions that killed another half a million Iraqi children between 1991 and 2003, not to mention the thousands of birth defects due to left over, depleted uranium shells from the 1991 invasion.

The majority of Iraqis are still without clean water, electricity, sewage and medical facilities. Unemployment stands at 70 percent.

Thousands of women, Iraqi



women, are forced into prostitution in neighboring Syria and Jordan to support their families.

1.8 million Iraqis have fled the country or been displaced.

Sectarian death squads and organized crime rule many of the streets.

Bribery, corruption, kidnapping, murder, rape and extortion are rampant.

Extremist Islam has crept into what was once the most secular Arab nations, eroding the rights women used to enjoy.

A majority of Iraqis, both Sunni and Shia, believe the American occupation is enflaming the sectarian violence.

All of this takes place under the occupation by American military forces, and the influence of the American government.

As for us, over 500 billion dollars has been spent on the war effort and counting. With the life-long costs of veterans' medical care, the costs will easily exceed 2 trillion dollars.

The country is in extreme debt, with China buying most if not all US securities.

The dollar continues to fall, and if China makes any extreme changes to their currency, America could go into deep recession.

Veterans' benefits, including adequate psychological care, have been slashed, even as VA hospitals are overwhelmed.

Retirement benefits for the military have been slowly cut to fund the war.

Evaluating the opportunity costs, billions that could go to fund universal health care, funding for public schools, affordable college tuition, and terrorism prevention, are being sacrificed for this war.

Over 3,050 American service members have been killed or died as a result of the war, all with

*continued on next page*

# In Search of The Happy Medium

ERIK LOBO

One week ago today I was at the House Judiciary Committee hearing with several other members of Veterans For Peace to hear our national president Elliott Adams testify on the need for the impeachment of President Bush. He did us proud! I sat next to my dear friend and sister-in-the-struggle, Cindy Sheehan.

Four years ago today I watched my father take his last breath with enormous grace and dignity after 82 years of a life devoted to helping others. He was the skipper of USN LCT 127 in the Pacific 1942-45. Deciding at 9 years old that he "wanted to work with kids," he was a camp counselor and director, coach, teacher and principal. He preached the benefits of finding common ground with others, which he called, "the happy medium." This is where people with varying viewpoints could co-exist without animosity. He saw no happy medium to be reached with the neocon fascists in control today. I agreed.

I got my start in the struggle for justice protesting the Vietnam

War in 1968, and was in Grant Park here in Chicago during the Democratic National Convention when the police went off on us. I joined the American Indian Movement (AIM) in 1970. I was in John Conyers' Detroit district in 1972 with AIM, working with the Black Panthers on programs to help school kids and seniors. I was in the Navy Reserves 1976-82, and have been a cop for 25 years in urban combat zones. I went and sat in a ditch at Camp Casey in Crawford, Texas in August of '05. I then joined VFP, and then Vietnam Veterans Against War.

I have dealt with death and devastating violence personally. I lost friends from combat, both military and here on the streets. Many of the wonderful folks I've met under sad circumstances the last few years have much in common with each other. We all have our own personal stories and heartaches, and a quest for justice and peace. We all face some of the same obstacles and forces of resistance that we must overcome. Stress is a HUGE common factor, regardless of the specific causes of

it for each of us. And stress often causes avoidable conflicts.

We may be anti-war or peace movement, long time vets or rookies; whatever the differences, we all have a COMMON adversary and COMMON goals. We are in the SAME boat. Drill a hole under my seat and you will get wet, too. We sail or sink TOGETHER. I would prefer we sail on to justice for ALL of us. As I said, I am Camp Casey, VFP and VVAW. I participate in events held by Iraq Veterans Against War, CodePINK, UFPJ, ANSWER, World Can't Wait, AFSC, and others. If they have similar goals, I can deal with them. Conflicts occur, usually with scheduling. These don't have to be insurmountable. If we can maintain our focus on mutual goals and not let egos and personalities block reason, we can reconcile and move forward together. I often refer back to Brother Marvin Gaye's "What's Goin' On", where he plaintively sings: "You know, we've got to find a way to bring some understanding here today."

We all have our roles in this struggle. I'm a "nobody." My role

is to try to keep some of those who are a "somebody" safe and healthy, lend moral support and maybe a little comic relief. Col. Ann Wright is the ultimate role model for a veteran for peace, and the one whom many of us would love to see become the first female president. David Swanson has tirelessly become THE proponent for impeachment. I hate to start mentioning names because I don't want to leave out so many true peace warriors. Those "nobodies" like me in the background fulfill important roles, too. We ALL matter. I will always stand with Cindy Sheehan, a Gold Star mother. I will never disown nor abandon my fellow veterans. I continue to work with all those seeking justice and peace. We all NEED each other, and must respect each other. We have all suffered. We all need healing. There will be conflicts. Some of us are always willing to mediate and help resolve these. Please let us.

In memory of Bob Gilbert, I ask that we find a "happy medium".



## Have Courage, We Will Win

*continued from previous page*

families whose lives are now shattered. Twenty thousand plus are wounded, and over half of those are disabled and disfigured for life.

Two-thirds of all Iraq vets suffer from PTSD, and are not receiving proper or adequate treatment; many are sent back to the frontlines.

Desperate for manpower, the military is accepting more of the lowest-scoring aptitude recruits, including those accused of felonies, or admitted membership in hate groups.

Foreign nationals are being heavily recruited, with promises of citizenship.

Increasing numbers of raw recruits are coming out of the most desperate regions of our country, small town and inner city youth with little chance for jobs, health care, and an education.

Several reports have determined the Army and Marines to be on the verge of breaking.

Vast amounts of war-damaged equipment sits idly and in disrepair.

Repeat tours are taking their toll on families. The divorce rates for vets have risen to 80% for officers.

The Reserves and National Guards have only 30% of their units fully equipped.

With the recent escalation, more part-time troops will be called up, losing income, benefits, promotions, even their positions to their full-time employers.

Suicides committed by troops are common in theater, and after redeployment.

In a lawless war zone, military women are often targeted by their fellow soldiers for rape and sexual harassment; very little is reported or dealt with appropriately.

Last but not least, official estimates state that 8,000 troops have gone AWOL since the war began.

Goodwill towards America has declined drastically the world over, with our economy hanging on the military policy of the Chinese, and our leaders threatening tactical nuclear war with a country three

times the size of Iraq, and a major supplier of oil for Russia and China.

This is what I learned in just a year and half alone. The pieces are there. Finding them and putting the puzzle together takes just a little effort.

Our country is being led in the wrong direction, an illegal and immoral direction.

But to know our country was sent to war and devastated another civilization over falsehoods is something I will never stand for.

There are some things that we just cannot do; without principles, without sacrificing for what we believe, what is the point?

Send me to prison, torture me or kill me, I will never enable or condone the waging of war with another country over lies.

We as a free society live under the rule of peace, law and justice. We should never stand for this. It is our duty as children of God; it is our duty as human beings. No longer can we sit on the fence; no longer can we remain ignorant. If we ignore this responsibility, then we are equally culpable in these crimes, regardless of whether we are directly responsible.

In a system of democracy such as ours, the crimes of the government are the crimes of the people. It becomes our inherent responsibility to do whatever it takes to impede these crimes, and prevent their repeated commissions.

Wearing the uniform is no excuse; living in a cave is no excuse; being in college or retired is no excuse, and being too busy is no excuse.

Seemingly we are unaffected by the events that swirl around us but someday these events will effect all of us, and tragically they may come crashing down all at once, because we have not held those who illegally started the Iraq war accountable for their crimes. Evidence is clear they will start the same kind of war in Iran, using the same pattern of lies and deceit.

The cataclysmic events that were predicted after the fall of Baghdad will seem infinitesimal compared to the consequences of an attack on Iran.



*TRANSCRIBED BY TRISTA DI GENOVA,  
SENIOR WRITER AND EDITOR FOR THE  
CHINA POST, IN TAIWAN.*

# Memorial Day and the California Central Coast Chapter of VVAW

STEVE CRANDALL

The California Central Coast Chapter along with the Santa Barbara Chapter of Veterans For Peace attended the Memorial Day services at the Santa Barbara Cemetery. It was our first time presenting a wreath so we weren't quite sure what to expect. As we neared the presentation site we saw lots of uniforms. The uniforms were decorated with lots of ribbons and shiny medals. There were flags representing every military service and even unmilitary services like the Masons and the Elks. I felt like we were running a gauntlet as we drove by all the uniformed veterans. My VVAW bumper stickers proudly displayed for all to see.

We lifted the VVAW, VFP and IVAW wreaths out of the truck and looked for Lane Anderson, the VVAW and VFP member who suggested we do this. He and I had talked but we had never met. Finally I saw this big guy with a friendly smile and hoped the hell

it was Lane. Sure enough it was him. We exchanged introductions and looked for someone in charge. We were informed that a WWII Sgt. Major was in charge of the program. He had been wounded five times as he battled across Europe. We told him we were here to present our wreaths. He could not bring himself to call out our organizations names, although he silently agreed we were right in protesting the Vietnam War and the Iraq War. We gave him his space and wrote it up as pressure from his many peers eyeing our exchange. We decided we would stand to the side and when the last wreath was presented we would call out Vietnam Veterans Against the War, march up and salute all three wreaths. After the ceremony we were approached by a woman who offered to take group pictures for us. She was a Gold Star mother of a soldier killed in Iraq. She offered to take our pictures, thanked us for our service and our stand against

unjust wars. Wow!

After the ceremony we gathered our wreaths and headed to the Veteran's Memorial Building in downtown Santa Barbara for another memorial. We entered the building and set up our wreaths along with all the other wreaths that were previously at the cemetery. It didn't take long before the woman in charge approached us. She seemed eager to inform us that we were not welcome and we would not be allowed to display our wreaths. Here we go again. I thought we would be welcomed since we ran the gauntlet and skated near death at the cemetery. Lane decided to talk to her privately and inform her that we had just come from the ceremony at the cemetery and there were no incidents. Other members of the Veteran's Memorial Building committee that were at the cemetery backed us and also informed her that we should be able to present our wreaths.

Later I had the opportunity to talk to the lady in charge and she told me that she was certain we were there to disrupt the proceedings. I instantly looked at all the tables and imagined myself tipping them upside down.

Each organization sent a representative up to the front of the room to salute their wreath. I wheeled Carl, who suffers the effects of Agent Orange, to the front of the room. We both, honorably and respectfully saluted the VVAW wreath. Hopefully some of the attendees will remember us and we will be welcomed next year without all the hoopla. Regardless, we will be there next year honoring the fallen and our organizations with pride.



*STEVE CRANDALL IS THE PRESIDENT OF THE CA CENTRAL COAST CHAPTER OF VVAW.*



*California Central Coast Chapter with wreaths on Memorial Day*



*VVAW National Coordinator Marty Webster gives the overflow crowd a short history of VVAW & IVAW and thanks Watermelon Slim and the workers for their participation in the IVAW event*



*VVAW member and AIM Chapter Coordinator Gene Barrett (right) greets fellow Vietnam Vet Norman Largo from Brimhall, New Mexico at the AIM booth during a pow-wow recently.*

*VVAW in Salt Lake City is sponsoring the new AIM chapter*



VVAW National Coordinator Marty Webster joined IVAW Midwest regional members for an all day forum at the annual ComFest in Columbus, Ohio which included a screening and discussion of the upcoming Winter Soldier DVD.



VVAW Kentuckiana members Carol Rawert Trainer and Edison Farmer represent VVAW at a Moveon.org event April 24 in Louisville, KY in front of Senator Mitch McConnell's office



# HONOR THE WARRIOR, NOT THE WAR

## Vietnam Veterans Against the War

Fighting for Veterans, Peace and Justice since 1967

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



DONATIONS FOR





On Thursday, July 17 VVAW National Coordinator Marty Webster joined Columbus Ohio VVAW Regional Contact Mark Hartford and his wife to staff a table at a Crosby, Stills & Nash concert that took place in Kettering, Ohio

# The Replacement

JOSEPH GIANNINI

For a long time Tom Connors, a buddy of mine, encouraged me to write about Nam. On one occasion, several years back, he asked me if I'd known a Murphy in Vietnam. I said, "I think so, but what's the chance it's the same guy?" We dropped it. Several months later, Tom was going through my Nam photos. There was his friend Murphy.

**Quang Tri Province, Vietnam  
June 1968**

I'm a short-timer. Less than 30 days to go In Country. Due back in the World on July 23. I'm still the Executive Officer of Charlie Company. Our battalion is hard on platoon leaders. Due to a shortage, I just picked up a rifle platoon, Charlie Three.

**Letter written at Camp Carroll  
June 25, 1968**

Babe,

*I'm glad I have some time to write to you before we start our new operation. I just finished giving the Third Platoon their five-paragraph order. I'll have this platoon for this operation and until I leave. Two more operations and it's all over for me. One up by Alpha Three and the other by the Cua Viet River. Both areas leave a lot to be desired.*

*Right now we are in Camp Carroll standing down for the night. It's that part of the evening when almost everyone is writing a letter. The quiet that always descends upon us before we start another operation. For some reason I'm not apprehensive at all. I'll probably get some butterflies in the landing zone.*

*Tonight we sleep in hard tops. Some of us even have cots. It's a real morale booster to let these Marines stand down, even if it's only for one night. Some of these people haven't had a roof over their head for months. I think I'll even take my boots off tonight. Damn, it would be nice sleeping in the nude on a bed, of all things. The best part would be having you at my side, also nude. I'm getting real close now Babe. Every damn day is an eternity for me. Only a little while longer and it will be nothing but an unpleasant memory. Undoubtedly we'll never forget this past year. It's been a hell of a way of starting a marriage. I'm very proud that you decided to face it as my wife. That showed*

*a lot of courage on your part. I love you babe. See you in a little while.*

Joe

The odd thing is that June 25th is my 25th birthday and I don't even mention it. Some of the Marines in Charlie Company found out. They gave me a card made from an empty sand bag. I still have it

Less than a month to go and I'm back leading a rifle platoon. I don't sound upset but really I am. It's the most dangerous position to be in. The battalion is going up to the DMZ, aka the Dead Marine Zone, to make a sweep near a combat base called Con Thien. The base is famous for a siege it survived in September 1968. Con Thien means "Hill of Angels." It should have been named "Hill of Death." During the siege, 1,800 Marines were killed or wounded

We had been up there once before. We swept around Con Thien during the siege. My first memory is of when we choppered in. It was a hot LZ (Landing Zone). We came in during an NVA artillery barrage. I jumped out, ran a few paces and hit the ground. We were out in the open without cover. Finally, the incoming stopped. I tried to rise but fear held me down. I fought the fear, got to my feet and ordered, "Move out." Not a good first impression.

Charlie Company is ordered Point Company for the battalion sweep and Charlie Three is ordered point platoon for the company. Fuck. We chopper in without incident and move out. It's the dry season, really hot, 110, 120 degrees in the shade. We're moving through really rough terrain. Hacking our way through a jungle of vines and small trees. The heat is almost unbearable. We are constantly drenched in sweat.

I get word that a brown bars—a new second lieutenant—has joined our company. Actually the bars are gold. He is sent down to my platoon. We are still on point. I turn to look at the new guy. My replacement. He's a giant, well over six feet tall. A big, beefy Irishman. I say to myself, "Oh my god, he's not ready for this."

"What's your name?"

"Murphy. John Murphy," he replies.

As we're moving I intermittently glance back at him. He's beet red and struggling to breathe

but he's keeping up. Not a quitter. I'm too busy and upset to give words of encouragement. I don't have any nice left. "Murphy. I haven't got time to talk. Just fall in behind me. Don't stay too close. Watch and listen up. I'll be turning Charlie Three over to you in a few days."

Finally we are ordered to hold up. The battalion digs in for the night. I watch Murphy lay down on his back in a small patch of grass. He's dry heaving. Looks on the verge of a heart attack. A corpsman goes over to him. I look away. I have too many other concerns.

Three days later I turn Charlie Three over to Murphy and chopper to our rear at Quang Tri. I'm entitled to a break. I've been on the line with three rifle companies my whole tour. Unusual, but I've been lucky. I'm hanging around. Taking it easy. While I'm there, the battalion moves west and gets into a nasty fight on Mutters Ridge. Word comes back that Lieutenant Keppert has been killed. A direct hit from an artillery round turned him inside out. We were in Bravo Company together. He took over Bravo Three from me. I helped break him in. Our Battalion personnel officer asks me to inventory Keppert's personal property. Amongst his belongings I discover a stack of letters from grade school children. I never knew he'd been a teacher before he joined the Corps. That explains his gentle nature.

I'm bored, getting antsy. Decide to go back out. Now the battalion is at LZ Stud by the Laotian border. Close to the infamous Khe Sahn. A Marine combat base that had recently been surrounded by 20,000 NVA troopers. The Marines held on but the base was abandoned.

I join the battalion. Bunk down in a large bunker. Dry and warm. Great, if sharing it with huge centipedes, rats, and scorpions doesn't bother you. They keep their distance and don't take up too much space. I stay on.

A few days later I get a message to report to the battalion command post. I walk in and the battalion commander says, "Joe, your orders came in." "What sir?" "You're outta here. Get on the next chopper. Good-bye and good luck."

I don't have time to say good-

byes, not even to my replacement. I leave with Lieutenants Gregory and Ford. I chopper back to Quang Tri. From there I take a C 130 to Da Nang. At Da Nang I catch a commercial flight to Okinawa. On Okinawa I catch another commercial flight to California. In less than three days I'm back in the World. A day ahead of schedule. I haven't called home. I'm going to surprise everyone.

I get on a commercial flight for Kennedy. On the flight there are a few lieutenants that I know from Officer Candidate School and The Basic School in Quantico, Virginia. They too are on their way home from Nam. We are all tan and lean. Wearing our summer khakis. The stewardesses get swept up by our proud friendly demeanor and ignore the other passengers. We drink and joke. Warriors home from war. One stewardess hands a rose to each Marine. The plane lands and I bolt for a cab to see my parents and sister Flo in Canarsie. During the short ride I realize that the war is behind me. I'm overwhelmed by a feeling of well-being. I'm home.

I ring the bell and I'm buzzed in. I bound up a flight of stairs to greet them. They're surprised and shocked. I hand the rose to my mom and drop my sea bag. Hugs kisses and tears. The last time they saw me I was just a boy. I've returned a young man, half gray. We talk for a while but I'm anxious to see Annette. I change into civvies: a pair of khaki pants and a madras shirt. Borrow my Dad's car and drive to her parents' home.

The last time I saw Annette was in December on RandR in Hawaii. The last several months have been unsettling. We haven't written much. I'm going to surprise her. I park the car. I'm walking up her steps when she comes out her front door without noticing me. She reaches the steps, starts down and sees me coming up. As I reach to take her into my arms, she stands back and says, "You look like a clown." Her words shoot into me. A sucking chest wound. After a few seconds I say, "Hi Babe."



JOSEPH GIANNINI IS A FORMER MARINE GRUNT WHO FOUGHT IN 'NAM 1967-68 WITH THE 1ST BATTALION, 3RD MARINES. HE HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF VVAW SINCE THE FIRST GULF WAR.

# The Democrats' Favorite General

MARTIN SMITH

Three-star Gen. William Odom died unexpectedly of a heart attack on May 30, 2008. In recent years, Odom had become the darling of some segments of the anti-war movement for his calls for troop withdrawal from Iraq and criticism of the Bush administration's domestic wire-tapping program.

Odom was the perfect patriot poster-child to be chosen by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) to deliver the Democratic Party's response to Bush's weekly Saturday radio address last April.

Speaking with characteristic bluntness, Odom blasted Bush's war policy: "To put this in a simple Army metaphor, the Commander-in-Chief seems to have gone AWOL, that is 'absent without leave.' He neither acts nor talks as though he is in charge. Most Americans suspect that something is fundamentally wrong with the president's management of the conflict in Iraq. And they are right."

Yet missing from the Odom-mania in the liberal blogosphere and among Democratic Party politicians was any critique of the full spectrum of what the general stood for.

If Odom was a dove, then watch out for his talons. His anti-war rhetoric didn't match his 30-plus years of military service as a committed Cold War hawk. Odom graduated from West Point and advanced in the officer corps by overseeing the policy

of "Vietnamization"--substituting American-trained Vietnamese military forces for US troops--in the early 1970s.

He became known as an expert on Soviet affairs. He argued for confrontation with the USSR and was known as a hardliner for his opposition to detente. According to the *New York Times*, the USSR invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, which hardened relations between the superpowers, brought Odom to do "some joyous ice skating" over the vindication of his policy aims.

Under President Jimmy Carter, Odom served as military assistant to Zbigniew Brzezinski, now one of Barack Obama's foreign policy advisers. Odom was the architect of what became known as the Carter Doctrine, which established the right of the US to intervene militarily to protect its interests in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East region.

Carter-Brzezinski-Odom created a highly mobile Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) to place US troops and material in the Middle East and Southwest Asia at a moment's notice. The RDF was considered essential to provide muscle for the Carter Doctrine at a time when countries in the Persian Gulf were skeptical about allowing the US to create permanent military bases on their soil.

The RDF evolved into the US Central Command (CENTCOM),

which led 1991's Operation Desert Storm, the invasion of Afghanistan and the current invasion and occupation of Iraq.

In 2006, in the *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Odom published a glowing tribute to the foresight of the Carter administration for establishing CENTCOM, arguing that Carter's military build-up made possible the military successes of Desert Storm and Afghanistan, and that "CENTCOM's future is likely to include several more major military operations as well as dozens of small ones."

Odom rightly called Iraq the "greatest strategic disaster" in US imperial history; however, his calls for withdrawal were meant to better enable the US to pursue its strategic interests in the region.

As he put it in his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Iraq last April, "The only sensible strategy is to withdraw rapidly, but in good order. Only that step can break the paralysis now gripping US strategy in the region. The next step is to choose a new aim, regional stability, not a meaningless victory in Iraq... Withdrawal from Iraq does not mean withdrawal from the region. It must include a realignment and reassertion of US forces and diplomacy that give us a better chance to achieve our aim."

In other words, Odom was committed to US hegemony in the region, but through different

means. While calling for a withdrawal from Iraq, Odom was making clear that control of the region based on US economic interests remains the strategic imperative. His strategy called for more engagement with Europe and the other major powers based on restoring regional stability, but he also planned on keeping forces deployed in the region through CENTCOM in case of any potential future threats.

Those in the anti-war movement would do well to remember the sage advice given to me as a private in the Marine Corps: Beware of anyone with bars or stars on their collars. We don't need a general to justify our call for immediate withdrawal.

Odom's entire career and his continuing devotion to US domination of the Middle East demonstrate the extent to which both parties agree on the larger project of US imperialism, even as they differ on the best ways to pursue such goals.

Rather than mourn a general who is responsible for death and destruction throughout the Middle East and Southeast Asia, we're better served by returning to grassroots mobilization and taking to the streets.



*MARTIN SMITH, FORMER SGT.  
USMC, IS MIDWEST REGIONAL  
COORDINATOR OF IRAQ VETERANS  
AGAINST THE WAR.*



*Chicago IVAW members at Memorial Day 2008 in Chicago*

## PTSD Blues

Flying in a huey chopper  
Just above tree line  
I feel my heart beating fast  
I hear the engine whine

I light another cigarette  
My M16 in hand  
I hear someone holler  
"Five minutes till we land!"

M60's fire forward  
left and right and down  
I hope to fuck no one is there  
When we finally hit the ground

I wake up from my dream  
A reading lamp in hand  
The piece of shit won't fire  
I think it must be jammed

Then I find I'm in my bed  
No reason I should hide  
Then I stare into the dark  
And see the eyes that died

Doc, Pigpen and Poet  
My card playing friends  
On February 23  
Our card games had to end

I am the only one  
Who got to walk away  
Almost 40 years ago  
Seems like yesterday

They say revenge is sweet  
I guess I got us some  
It didn't taste like honey  
It felt just fucking numb

A pop hisses  
Up into the night  
Once the thing pops  
There will be light

Rising right in front of me  
One knee upon the ground  
A man about my age  
Hope I chambered a round

Hand grenade in his hand  
I've got him in my sight  
Just cuz this is war  
Still don't make it right

His eyes are looking right at me  
I wonder what he thinks  
I wonder does he have a wife  
I wonder does he drink

My finger squeezes tighter  
My weapon it responds  
I see a cloud of pink  
The light in his eyes is gone

Those eyes are everywhere  
I see them all the time  
I see those eyes in your eyes  
In the mirror they are mine

You'll never know how many times  
I have to see him die  
The thing that hurts the most  
It took 30 years to cry

I wish I could forget it all  
No matter how I try  
The only thing I hope is true  
I'll forget when I finally die

— Louis A. Griffiths  
USMC  
April 4, 1968-May 1, 1970

## brief encounter

Do you remember him?  
Pulled you out of the lake,  
that fall day in 67.  
I was in high school.

Your ride, a Skyhawk bomber  
missile struck. After ejecting  
parachute cord tangled,  
a hard landing, in small lake,  
middle of Hanoi, where you  
just dropped bombs, or were about to.

You were drowning,  
both arms broken, leg too.  
What were you thinking  
as you sunk in the still water?

What a sight you must have been,  
falling like a spinning leaf.  
Around and around till the splash.  
Hardened men don't float.

At height of the air raid,  
from a bomb shelter,  
a yellow man emerges,  
dragging two large bamboo poles.  
He enters the lake,  
along with a neighbor and  
swims toward your broken body,  
while others are dead or dying.

Pulled, barely conscious  
to the surface, they  
drag you ashore,  
on a makeshift pontoon  
like a trophy. At the bank  
a mob of 100 wait...

Kicking, spitting, a rifle butt  
breaking a shoulder, stabbing your leg.  
The pair drives them off,  
saving your life a second time.

Your 1999 autobiography,  
no mention of him  
that day he saved your life.  
Though, in 95 you meet him in Hanoi.

His name is Mai Van On,  
Died at 88 in 1998.

— Dayl Wise



# Warrior King

AARON DAVIS (REVIEWER)

**Warrior King: The Triumph and Betrayal of an American Commander in Iraq**  
By Nathan Sassaman and Joe Layden  
(St. Martin's Press, 2008)

In his new book Nate Sassaman writes, "Bring the soldiers home now. Today... I don't care how many generals, colonels, captains-whatever-think they can win the war. You know why? I thought I could win the war, too. But there is no war right now. It's law enforcement."

Now before you jump to conclusions for or against the war, pick up a copy of *Warrior King: The Triumph and Betrayal of An American Commander in Iraq*.

As a young Army Officer, I followed Nate Sassaman's career from quarterbacking the West Point football team to an 8-3-1 record and Cherry Bowl victory over Michigan State in 1984, until I saw him as a battalion commander featured on a CNN report by Nick Robertson in 2003.

Like the movie *Stop Loss*, *Warrior King* is the story of a young man from Oregon who attends West Point and believes in Duty, Honor and Country throughout his career. His story is

from a soldier's point of view. Nate has written a frank and sobering look into his career, leadership, Iraq occupation, corruption, frustrations, the UCMJ and his own PTSD.

**West Point:** "The academy courts and attracts type A personalities-overachievers driven to lead and succeed...most cadets shared a common trait; it was an almost pathological fear of failure."

**Training:** "There are inherent challenges leading eighteen-year-olds with no more than a high school education into combat. ...they have not been trained to win hearts and minds. They have been trained to fight and win. We instill in these men the desire (and the capability) to kill the enemy... We expect them to be machines, but they aren't. They are human beings. In Iraq the blanket term was "Hadji"...it leads one to dehumanize the opponent...there is a devaluing of human life."

**Leadership:** "Had my career not involved combat duty...I might have been able to play the game... advanced to the rank of general officer. Iraq taught me something: I am not made that way. I am a soldier, not a politician. It's one thing to blindly follow ignorant

orders in a time of peace; it's quite another when you're at war...the force is getting beaten down-physically, spiritually, and emotionally. The important thing...was not winning or losing... but putting the best face possible on something that is by definition, unpleasant: war. ...there seemed to be no coherent objective... To civilians and senior officers alike I used to say you really need to get some American blood on your hands before you start questioning commanders on the ground and how life should be over there. Fight your way out of a couple of ambushes, hold the hand of a friend as he dies, and then come and talk to me."

**Politicians:** "If you want to become a general officer, you'd better be a shrewd politician. ...the administration used the issue of weapons of mass destruction...for public relations purposes. Former secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld must accept a significant share of responsibility for what went wrong in Iraq. ...totally ignored the cultural and human endeavors...suggesting we could win a war with cell phones...F-16 rockets...and a handful of special forces troops riding camels and donkeys through the desert...it cost us a lot of American lives. ...inability to cope with a flood of young, unemployed, disgruntled Iraqi males...It's just not acceptable ...to invade other nations on the premise of eliminating a dictator without...a commitment to putting that nation back on its feet."

**War:** "War is imprecise and unpredictable. It is in a word, terrible. There are victims in war, sometimes innocent, sometimes not. The line between right and wrong can be blurred to the point of invisibility....a lot of terrible things are going to happen in the course of a war...the sadness that envelops you as you walk through a farm and see body parts of children...war changes everyone who experiences it...a group of soldiers walking around for the better part of an hour, wearing latex gloves, scooping up body parts...my spirit was broken...I had crossed over to the dark side. I have been, for most of my life, an optimist, but Iraq sucked much of that out of me. This is the reality of war, and it is the price of bringing democracy to Iraq."

**Post Traumatic Stress Disorder:** "I find it hard to believe

that anyone who saw combat duty in Iraq can possibly escape the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder. ...no one comes home unscathed...the irritability and anxiousness were unmanageable... I lay awake...replaying events in my head...I fought the war all over again. I'd wake up bathed in sweat. You can only fight the war only so many times in your head, but I couldn't turn off the noise."

**Corruption:** "On more than one occasion we raided homes... discovered goods that obviously been stolen from trucks on their way to an American base PX... cases of pampers, foot powder, or women's clothing from Sears or K-Mart...One guy had a closet filled with piles of Jaclyn Smith blouses."

**Contract Security:** "...the contract security experts? ...running around in white suburbans...dumb as rocks... flying up and down highway one at eighty, ninety miles per hour."

**Uniform Code of Military Justice:** "I've come to view the Uniform Code of Military Justice legal system as inherently unfair. ...you are guilty until proven innocent..."

**Religious ideology:** "There is no separation of state and religion in Iraq; it's one and the same.... will never look like an American or European democracy, and it's unrealistic to expect otherwise. The fracturing of this country is more deeply rooted in religious differences than in anything else..."

**Occupation:** "The United States will continue to maintain a large occupational presence-a police force, in other words-in the Middle East for years, perhaps even decades to come."

Now that you know Nate tells it how it is, I don't want to spoil the best parts as he leads his infantry battalion into battle, deals with the death of two of his men, and his Article 15 in front of his mentor Maj. Gen. Ray Odierno, who now commands all troops in Iraq.

You don't really think I am going to tell you how it all ends, do you? Not!



AARON DAVIS IS VVAW CONTACT IN UTAH. AS A FORMER ARMY RESERVE MAJOR, HE STILL IS A PAIN IN THE ASS TO THE MILITARY INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX AND EVERY POLITICIAN.

## Photo Jim Dumb

*continued from page 40*

killing and the killing will help me. We're just regular grunts, we're noisy, were not elite. But after a time we learn the rhythm of this war. This war dance. Wait. Engage. Disengage. The men call it contact, movement or bringing scunner. The men psych themselves up. "Time to kick ass and take names," they say. And between contact and kicking ass or having our asses kicked there is tension. It starts small, then builds and builds until we secretly pray it will happen. That we walk into them or them into us, or we mortar them or they rocket us, then the tension explodes like perfect sex, and afterwards... afterwards we're spent. Days, weeks, nothing happens, then terror, instant and deep, then relief, like paradise, since the killing is done and the living have buried the wounded and dead. Until it starts all over again.

I watch as the bodies are

scavenged for souvenirs, then stacked one atop the other. Watch someone slip a short fused grenade beneath the hideous pile. Listen as insects, drawn by the scent, swarm to feast.

"Move out," says the lieutenant. And we march past the unblinking eyes, the open mouths, the purple patched faces, the stiffening upper limbs. Ten minutes later the grenade explodes. Jim Dumb smiles. The enemy have attempted to retrieve their dead.

"NVA," says Jim, slitting his neck with his index finger.

We stop and listen then continue forward.




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MARC LEVY SERVED WITH D 1/7  
CAV IN VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA  
(1970) AS AN INFANTRY MEDIC. HE  
IS A MEMBER OF VVAW.



Doc Levy

## Retraction of Article in the Veteran, Volume 38, Number 1, Spring 2008

VVAW NATIONAL OFFICE

VVAW NATIONAL OFFICE RETRACTS the article which appeared in the "Volume 38 Number 1" issue of the Veteran entitled "Warning: Scott Camil Is Not a VVAW Member." That article attacked Scott Camil and accused him, among other things, of malfeasance. In addition, the article used derogatory language to describe Mr. Camil.

This article was published without approval of the full National Office of VVAW. Publish-

ing such an article, containing unfounded allegations of 40 year old acts of malfeasance on Mr. Camil's part was not appropriate or helpful to the anti-war struggle we are engaged in. The National Office made a mistake of oversight by not keeping sufficient track of the publishing process. The byline for the article was omitted which may have allowed readers to assume that the article was a statement of policy of VVAW. It was not a statement of policy.

During our investigation of the publishing of this article, we interviewed its author and requested the production of evidence to support the claims in the article against Mr. Camil. The author, Barry Romo, did not furnish evidence to back up the charges. Therefore the National Office of VVAW has concluded that the accusations against Scott Camil in the article were and are unfounded and baseless.

We hereby and fully retract

## Still Faces; Ghostly Places

Here:  
Friday night.  
Street lights bright  
Hearts seemingly light.

There:  
Sunday pages list ages  
(too young)  
And rank  
(usually not much).  
COD/POD  
(wrong time / wrong place).  
Branch of service  
(which shoemaker's elves corporation).

Here and There:  
People laugh, shriek and whine.  
Grumble, mumble, curse or  
worse, stay silent.  
Too much of the time  
frivolous and too serious  
feelings and thoughts chime.

Everywhere:  
Every one's yearbook  
isn't worth a long look.  
The weekly tally is an alley  
you don't have to walk forever.

Flip the script and slip  
away from the scene of  
what shouldn't have been.  
It's just a little war and  
who cares about the score?  
Victory is breathing more.

A life time's as long as you live.  
Use all you can give. See, savor  
and soar. There is no more.

— Horace Coleman

the article and disavow its statements concerning allegations against Mr. Camil. We apologize to Mr. Camil for any embarrassment or inconvenience this article has caused him. We also apologize to our members, and to the Anti-War movement. We wish to move forward and continue working with the organizations and individuals involved in WSI II and other actions to end this unjust war and achieve decent benefits for all veterans.

# 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

## Photo Jim Dumb

MARC LEVY

It's early morning in dry season. Third squad sits cross legged on a carpet of leaves in the bamboo forest. We boil water over a fire made with small chunks of C-4, mix in powdered coffee, drink and savor the synthetic brew. We make jokes, toss C-ration cigarettes to our Kit Carson Scout. His name is Diem Diem but we call him Jim Dumb. Seventeen, thin and dark complected, on patrol our former enemy walks third in line. "Beau coup NVA," he often says, as we walk past enemy foot prints. But we like this black haired, mustacheless, dark young man and treat him with respect.

D'wee was better. On point he walked quick and signaled danger by flicking his wrist. He knew the jungle's dark secrets, and kept us safe.

But D'wee is dead. Now we have Jim, who likes to smoke and smile and wouldn't know a bunker complex from a chrome plated '55 Chevy.

Jim Dumb drops the slender five butt packets into a large clear plastic bag filled with Newport Menthol, Winston Filter Tips, No Filter Camels, LSMFT Lucky Strikes, and green US Army matchbooks whose small print shouts "Close cover before

striking." He crinkles the bag shut, drops it into his pack, plucks the cigarette behind his ear, stuffs it into his mouth, lights it, takes a long drag, spews out smoke, strokes his hairless chin, looks at me.

"Tanks Duck," he says.

He means 'Doc.' How can you not like this harmless young man?

I take my camera out of a water proof sack and shoot him. The flash creates a story book of shadows and silhouettes. I crawl over and teach Jim magic.

"One finger here. Other hand there. Look here. Press," I say, narrating with gestures.

"OK. OK, Duck," he says.  
"Now I take you pik ta."

Jim Dumb angles, toys, tilts the camera, lost in its cross hairs.

You can do it!" says the lieutenant, who sits near by.  
"C'mon, do it!"

I smile a Jim Dumb smile, the unreliable Kit Carson Scout finds the shutter button, presses it, then slams himself flat to the ground. In the distance: a hissing noise, dazzling light, machine gun fire, the forest shakes when the mines explode. We grab our rifles and hug the earth. A hundred meters



Diem Diem (Jim Dumb)

west, first platoon lays down fire as the trip flares bright magnesium kiss illuminates the forest. The lieutenant leaps up.

"Let's go," he says. "Let's go."

Ten of us run, crouch, push, sway, step quickly, quickly. We do not feel the razor-like bamboo cuts, the sharp bite of wait-a-minute vines, we ignore the leeches that drop from trees. We run and run until we see it.

Three NVA are screaming.

They shriek because they cannot fire their weapons. They howl because soon they will be dead. From close range GIs take pot shots. Take pot shots at men who have no legs.

I kneel down. Salty tears streak my face. It's only my second time in combat. Soon I'll be different. Soon revenge for our dead and wounded will meld with fear and I will help with the

*continued on page 38*

### History Repeats Itself

