



# VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

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April 2006

Dear Supporter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War,

Thank you so much for your contribution to our efforts to end the war in Iraq. With your help we are mobilizing veterans to speak out against the war and to organize for decent veterans' benefits. I feel honored to have your support.

This spring members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War played significant roles in the anti-war demonstrations on the third anniversary of the war. Three of our leaders, Dave Cline, Bill Perry and Ward Reilly played central roles in Walkin' to New Orleans, a five day march by veterans and survivors of Hurricane Katrina along the Coastal Highway from Mobile to New Orleans. The march's slogan, "Every bomb dropped in Iraq explodes along the Gulf Coast," was based on a statement by Martin Luther King about Vietnam.

Veterans' and military family groups joined with local African-American groups and immigrant rights groups to emphasize the connections between the cost of the war and the failure of the government to respond adequately to the damage from Hurricane Katrina.

We hear a lot about the U.S. public turning against the war. When I went to the anti-war march on March 18 in Chicago as part of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War contingent, I had two very interesting conversations. One was with a helicopter pilot now in his 60's. He had been wounded in Vietnam in 1963 on the day Kennedy was shot. He then did a second tour of Vietnam in 1969. He had never been to an anti-war march before, but he marched with us over the whole route and he told me that he wants to join VVAW.

The other conversation was with a fundamentalist Christian high school teacher who talked with me at the rally before the march. He had served in the Air Force from 1986-1994. His fundamentalist associates tell him not to go to demonstrations — this was his second—because there are Communists and anarchists there. He told me that he thinks Communists and anarchists have a right to demonstrate and that he is pissed off that some fundamentalists back George Bush as if he had no flaws. We talked for a long time and he held up one end of the VVAW banner during the rally.

The Chicago anti-war march was huge — the police estimated 7,000 people. Our members participated in marches all over the country, some of them, like the one in Portland, even larger. Often we were asked to lead the marches along with other veterans and military family organizations.

**Ray Parrish, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War military counselor keeps getting busier.** He tells me that more and more veterans are hearing about the military counseling program as the result of our anti-war work. He has had calls from California, Texas and the East Coast from veterans who saw our members demonstrating against the war.

Thanks to your generous financial support, Ray can give veterans and GI's the benefit of the knowledge and experience he has gained over his 30-year career as a military counselor.

Kevin, an army member on active duty, called him from a southeastern state. Kevin was home after a one-year tour in Iraq, where he suffered a back injury when his truck turned over as a result of a roadside bomb exploding. In Iraq, he was given minimal treatment, and then sent back to go on marches with an 80-pound backpack. His back got worse and worse. His First Sergeant and his Commanding Officer told him to tough it out, "It's just a sore back," and they ignored the military doctor's statements that his activity should be restricted. Back in the U.S. his back began to improve since he no longer had to go on marches, but now his unit is preparing to go back to Iraq.

Ray told Kevin that the military was violating its own medical regulations. He told Kevin to go to a doctor in the VA or to a civilian doctor to get documentation for a medical discharge. If his CO ignored the documents, he should come back with a cover letter referring to Article 138 that covers redress of grievances. If that didn't work he could complain to his Commander's Commander with a copy to a Senator or Congressional Representative. Knowing that there were things he could do gave Kevin the confidence that it was worth the effort to try.

Ray says that the military is so desperate for warm bodies that it is ignoring its own regulations about fitness for duty. They are also ignoring "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." Joe, a gay member of the National Guard who knew he would soon be deployed to Iraq told Ray that he came out to his First Sergeant, to his Commander, and to his Chaplain. They all took the position that "we didn't ask, so we don't have to listen." Joe was debating whether he should go AWOL or go to Iraq.

Ray received a call from Carol, a military recruiter who had medical problems and who had come to feel that recruiting for the Iraq war was violating her conscience. She said she hated the continual lying and she no longer believes in the war. Because she cannot honestly say that she thinks all wars are wrong, she is not eligible for Conscientious Objector status. Ray worked with her to stop minimizing her physical symptoms and her sleepless nights so that she could begin to build a case for medical discharge.

On a lighter note, I am recently back from attending the annual "Blessing of the Bock" in Milwaukee. With Milwaukee Vietnam Veterans Against the War in leadership, beer micro-brewers are invited to a festival where a priest blesses the new spring bock beer. VVAW cooperates with more mainstream veterans groups to raise money for the My Lai Peace Park in Vietnam and for the Library of Vietnam Project. Over the last five years, the festival has sent \$26,000 to Vietnam to help build libraries, schools, and clinics, as well

as supporting a revolving loan fund to enable poor Vietnamese women to start small businesses. Veterans and others, whatever their political views, appreciate the good beer. They also join together in a spend a moment of silence honoring the now 53 Wisconsin soldiers who have died in Iraq and Afghanistan, while a bell rings as each name is read.

**Thanks to your donations to our organization, we are able to continue to make supporting Iraq Veterans Against the War a priority.** Their opposition to the war they fought in has incredible symbolic force. Because we recognize what a difference they can make, we helped with a major IVAW fundraising effort in December. Within our organization, we have initiated a program to publicize both IVAW and our own military counseling program. We are organizing our members to distribute the IVAW and the Military Counseling brochures in community colleges and VA Hospitals. We are also doing the pilot work for an advertising campaign that will publicize IVAW and our Military Counseling Program in publications that Iraq vets are likely to read.

Cincinnati Vietnam Veterans Against the War member Marty Webster has been speaking at local showings of the reissued 1972 documentary "Winter Soldier." The original film won major awards in Europe, but was barely distributed in the United States because of its explosive content: veterans testifying to the war crimes and atrocities that they themselves committed or witnessed in Vietnam.

Needless to say, U.S. torture and war crimes in Iraq have made the film highly relevant today. Vietnam Veterans Against the War held the Winter Soldier Hearings that are the subject of the film in 1971, and VVAW members have participated in panel discussions after the recent screenings in various cities. The film will be available on DVD after April 30<sup>th</sup> from [www.wintersoldierfilm.com](http://www.wintersoldierfilm.com).

Our members continue their ongoing activities, speaking to high schools, participating in counter-recruiting efforts and making themselves available to talk with other veterans in their area.

On April 29<sup>th</sup>, New York City will see a labor-led anti-war march for the first time since World War I. Vietnam Veterans Against the War National Coordinator Bill Davis, a national officer of U.S. Labor Against the War, has played a leadership role in the upcoming march.

Every year Vietnam Veterans Against the War holds anti-war Memorial Day activities to ensure that the holiday is not wholly taken over by right-wing efforts to use it to glorify militarism. This May 26-29, VVAW National Coordinator Bill Perry will repeat his incredibly successful display of tombstones representing the Iraq War dead in Liberty Bell Plaza opposite the Liberty Bell. This time he will include color photos of the deceased on the most visible tombstones, and he will have floral arrangements and votive candles burning.

I will report on the success of all of these upcoming events in my next update.

Of course, we don't expect you to make a contribution every time you receive an update. However, if you are able to make a donation at this time, you will help us have the greatest possible effect as we work to end the war and the glorification of militarism that is one of its causes. Contributions to VVAW are tax-deductible.

For peace and justice,



Barry Romo  
VVAW National Coordinator



*Cindy Sheehan (center, in VVAW t-shirt) at the Veterans-Survivors March ....  
Mobile to New Orleans - photo courtesy of John Grant*

I am sending Vietnam Veterans Against the War ☐\$35 ☐\$50 ☐\$100 ☐\$250 ☐\$500 ☐Other  
to support its work for peace and its efforts to expose the Bush Administration's hypocritical neglect  
of returning veterans. Checks to VVAW are tax deductible. You can also donate online at [vvaaw.org](http://vvaaw.org).

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