



VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

PO Box 408594, Chicago, IL 60640 - (773) 276-4189

www.vvaw.org

vvaw@vvaw.org

July 2006

Dear Supporter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War,

Thank you so very much for your contributions to Vietnam Veterans Against the War. We are so grateful to have your backing as we work to end the war and get decent treatment for all veterans.

Counter-recruiting is one of our most important activities. Many of us speak in high school classrooms and talk about the realities behind the recruiters' spiel. I think I told you in a previous update about Latoyia, the commander of her battalion in her high school ROTC, who decided to go to college and not into the army because she opposed the war. We put her in touch with a group that gives scholarships to young people who might otherwise have to join the military. Latoyia received the scholarship, and she has just finished her first year of college.

We also cooperate with the American Friends Service Committee and other groups who pass out counter-recruiting literature at public events. Our military counselor, Ray Parrish, gives trainings to counter-recruiting activists. **It is because of your contributions that Vietnam Veterans Against the War is able to support a military counselor.**

Ray also was personally involved in defending our rights to leaflet. He and a young woman who is also a VVAW member were passing out counter-recruiting leaflets at the Chicago Blues festival. The police told them they were not allowed to leaflet where they were standing near the recruiters, who also had set up shop at the festival. Ray told them they had the legal right to be in a public place and refused to move. The police physically pushed Ray and Amy back, but they just told the police that they would be moving back to their old spot as soon as they left. Meanwhile, Amy called the National Lawyers Guild from her cell and Ray suggested to the police that they discuss the law with their commander. Pretty soon the commander showed up and told the police under him that Ray and Amy had the right to leaflet there!

Ray recently got a call from George, an active duty soldier who was back in the United States after a tour in Iraq. George knew that his unit was scheduled to return to Iraq soon for a second deployment. He had joined the military for economic reasons, but now he was wondering if he could become a conscientious objector (CO). He had begun to feel that what he was doing was wrong. A turning point came when he was having discussions with fellow GI's about Abu Ghraib and all the others felt that "we have to be as mean as the enemy." He was the only one who thought that something was wrong. He was worried

that, if he went back to Iraq, he would be ordered to do something wrong. He was afraid that he would do the easy thing and obey an illegal order,

His sergeant had told him that a person who voluntarily enlisted could never qualify as a CO.

Ray talked to Goerge about what his sergeant had said. He told George that, for many conscientious objectors, their belief that war is wrong becomes crystallized by their experience of combat, which shows them the horror of war in a way they never could have understood without that experience. Ray made it clear to him that if he genuinely felt that all war was wrong, he met the legal qualification for conscientious objector status. The last time Ray talked to George on the phone, George was planning to make his CO application.

Often Ray gets calls from veterans who are having difficulty getting benefits for disabilities resulting from their service. For example, Larry, a Vietnam vet, was unemployable because he was nearly totally blind. He had diabetes, which is now recognized as a service-connected disability because diabetes is one of the illnesses caused by Agent Orange, the defoliant that was used in Vietnam. However, his doctor did not think his blindness was caused by his diabetes.

Ray worked with Larry about how to approach his doctor. He explained that it wasn't necessary for his doctor to say that diabetes was the sole cause of his blindness for Larry to be eligible for benefits. In addition, his doctor did not need to express certainty. VA regulations require only that the doctor say that it is at least as likely as not that his blindness aggravated his vision loss. Armed with this information, Larry is in a much better position to get his doctor to agree to write him the letter he needs

Another recent activity Ray did was to go to Washington, DC over Mothers' Day weekend to participate in a conference of GI counselors. While he was there, he spent Mothers' Day with mothers who had lost children in Iraq. The mothers, Ray says, often develop relationships with the veterans from their child's unit. The other vets call the mother to offer support, but often she ends up 'mothering' the young soldiers, listening to their problems, giving them information about the GI Rights Hotline or a referral to Iraq Veterans Against the War.

Every year Vietnam Veterans Against the War sponsors events on Memorial Day in different cities. We want to prevent the media from giving this holiday an exclusively pro-war spin. And we genuinely mourn our friends and family whose lives have been lost to war. For example, New York/New Jersey VVAW joined other anti-war veterans' and military families' groups at the United Nations and walked from there to Battery Park. After an open mike when anyone can come up and speak about someone he or she remembers, they cast flowers into the water.

In Chicago, we held our Memorial Day event at the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial downtown. Speakers included members of Iraq Veterans Against the War, Code Pink,

VVAW, and an Illinois State Representative who has introduced a resolution into the legislature calling for Bush's Impeachment. We were pleased that we received superb coverage in the Black and Hispanic newspapers—the papers read by the communities that military recruiters are targeting. But to me, the most moving part of the day was something unplanned. When I arrived at the event, I saw a young guy I didn't recognize. I went over to welcome him and he turned out to be a recently discharged vet who read about our event in the newspaper and came because he wanted to be with fellow veterans on Memorial Day. I took him over to meet a member of Iraq Veterans Against the War who had not been scheduled to speak. I didn't have time to make any introductions because they started hugging each other like long-lost brothers. They had served in the same unit until one was sent to Iraq and one to the Balkans. They agreed to come up to the mic and the two of them stood there with their arms around each other and told the crowd how much finding each other on Memorial Day meant to them. They joined us at the party afterwards and stayed for hours talking to us and to each other.

In Philadelphia, one of our national coordinators, Bill Perry, celebrated Memorial Day by again taking the lead in setting up a display of tombstones, one for each U.S. soldier who has died in Iraq. Bill was interviewed about the display on CBS, ABC, and National Public Radio. With the Bush administration preventing photographers from picturing coffins as they come back from Iraq and with Bush staying away from military funerals, it has become the task of the peace movement to publicly mourn the dead and to remind the public about the huge costs in lives that Americans and Iraqis are paying.

Thanks to your donations, Vietnam Veterans Against the War is able to organize these events and to get them covered in the media.

Dave Cline, another Vietnam Veterans Against the War National Coordinator, spoke at the Buffalo, NY event, "Peace has no Borders," where hundreds of anti-war veterans and activists crossed the border into Canada to meet with Iraq War resisters who are living in exile in Canada. In addition, he has just gotten home from a second Canadian event, "Our Way Home Reunion," a gathering of Vietnam War resisters who are meeting to thank Canada for offering them asylum and to ask the Canadian government to give asylum to the resisters of the current war. In addition to speaking, Dave got to hear some of my long-time favorite musicians, Buffy St. Marie and Country Joe, and to hear former Senator George McGovern deliver the keynote address!

Our members in Texas have started a new project. Dave Collins and Ray "Doc" White have helped produce and distribute a new film, "The Costs of War," with award-winning director Patrick Phillips. In the film, veterans from Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, and the current Iraq War, talk about what war has cost them and has cost our country. The film was given the Best Film award in a local film festival in College Station, Texas. This is particularly impressive knowing that College Station is the home of Texas A & M, which sends more officers into the army than West Point. The producers made sure it was cut to 50 minutes for classroom use, but Dave Collins reports that Texas teachers are a bit gun-shy and it has been shown mostly at community events and at international venues.

Proceeds from the film go to a non-profit initiated by Texas VVAW and Veterans for Peace members, the Veterans Assistance Fund, which has made several small grants to organizations that help veterans of the current war, including a grant to the VVAW Military Counseling Program.

Thank you again for your support of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. I apologize if you are getting extra mailings like ongoing "introductory" letters from Howard Zinn. We are working to eliminate your name from the lists we use to introduce VVAW to new donors, but this is proving to be more difficult than we expected.

We know you won't be able to donate every time you receive one of these updates about our work, but, if you are able to make a contribution at this time, I can promise you that we will use it to fight militaristic attitudes among our youth. We will encourage young people to check out other alternatives before enlisting, and we will continue to raise public awareness that this war is opposed not only by the "usual suspects," but also by people who came to oppose the war as a result of firsthand exposure to combat in Vietnam.

For peace and justice,



Barry Romo
VVAW National Coordinator



VVAW marching in New York City, April 29, 2006

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 vvaw.org.

Name (print) _____
Address _____
City, State, Zip _____
E-Mail Address (please print clearly) _____