



NEXT VFP 56 MEETING

April 6, 2006
7:00 pm at the
Marsh Commons
101 H Street, Arcata

GI Rights Hotline in the News

According to the March 7, 2006 Democracy Now broadcast, calls to the GI Rights Hotline have increased from 1,000 calls per year before the invasion of Iraq to 4,000 calls PER MONTH!

As pointed out by 'Nate' Lomba, that's a 4,700 percent increase in calls from military service men and women seeking information about Conscientious Objection, refusal to deploy, et cetera.

Why I Stand

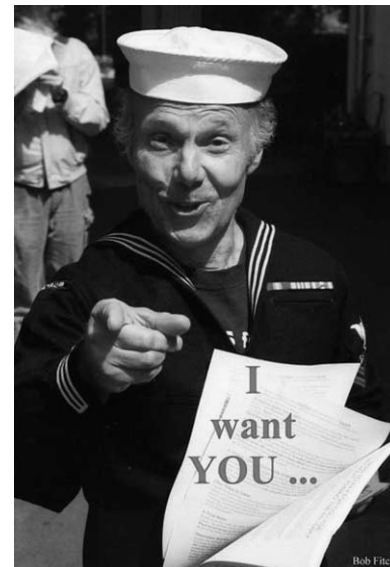
by Carl Stancil

Members of VFP Chapter 56 have been vigiling on the Arcata Plaza each Friday evening from 5 to 6 PM since the beginning of the Iraq War. Many passersby glance and simply look away. Some stop and ask, "What is this?" Others take the time to read our mission statement and examine the photos of the soldiers who have been killed. Sometimes a young child will point and tug at their parent's hand. The thoughtful parent will stop and explain the reason for all of the persons standing silently. Still others beep their horns in support. At times an individual (usually a middle-aged white man in a shiny expensive car) will stop and berate us as unpatriotic and suggest that we go to Iraq. Young high school boys will sometimes yell, "War is good!" or "Blood must flow."

As I stand facing the flag over the post office my mind often goes to the numbness I felt years ago as a Vietcong set his sights on me and prepared to pull the trigger. My breath becomes shallow as I take on the mind of a young soldier on patrol in Iraq, a sitting duck who only months before had been a carefree high school student with excited visions of the future filled with hopes and plans. I want him to be here at home with his girlfriend and skateboard baggy pants and all. If I could I would gladly trade places. He is just beginning his life and I want to support his hopes and dreams. I realize he has been put there in my name and both Americans and Iraqis are being killed and maimed as I stand here.

Standing in the cold wetness, raindrops trickle on my face mingling with tears. Jesus said it well, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

I stand to help me remember the work I need to do. Perhaps it will help you remember too.



Carl wants *you* to stand for peace.
PHOTO: BOB FITCH

VFP-56 Member Profile: O. Keith Wheeler

by Becky Luening

This profile is the first of a series I hope to write for this newsletter. When I mentioned the idea of this column to Bill Thompson, he immediately suggested I interview Keith Wheeler, because he knew Keith had recently returned to the place he had served—Saudi Arabia—and might have some interesting experiences to share. Keith is also someone many of us haven't met, because even though he's been a member of Chapter 56 for about three years, he lives in Mad River, out Hwy 36 just over the Trinity County line, and rarely comes to meetings. When Keith insisted his was not the typical VFP

story, I disagreed, because after meeting many Veterans For Peace, I know there is no typical story. Each is unique, and they all contain clues about what is wrong with the military mindset.

Born and raised in Corning, California, as a young man Keith Wheeler wanted to follow his family's Naval tradition. His father had served in the Navy during World War I, and his older brother was a Pearl Harbor survivor. So in 1954 he signed up for midshipman training. Given the choice between

continued on page 2...

VFP Profile: Keith Wheeler

...cont'd from page 1

an Annapolis program and the NROTC program at UCLA, he chose the latter because it was closer to home. He received his first real taste of military life during a summer Atlantic cruise aboard a destroyer. But he resigned from the program after just one year, partly because he couldn't stomach the elitism and sexism inherent in military officer culture. He had an especially hard time accepting that enlisted men were lower class, since his brother, a war hero he looked up to, had been an enlisted man.

Back in the USA, Keith's train ride home took him through the South, which really opened his eyes to racism. He experienced the indignity of segregation when, after using the facilities in a filthy restroom (the only sign he had looked for said "Men"), a Black man came in and said to him, "Son, you're not supposed to be here." So when Keith went back to college, he marched for civil rights. This probably set the stage for his later involvement in the anti-Vietnam war movement.

After returning to California, Keith attended Chico State University part-time, majoring in Psychology. With now a wider worldview, he had a little less blind faith in the military and U.S. government. Then, in 1959, he was drafted into the Army. The fact that he was still in school didn't save him, because he was attending only part-time. This was because he did not have the money to go to school full-time; just as today, poor men were at a disadvantage when it came to avoiding military service.

Keith could have just fought the Cold War in a cushy assignment in Monterey, where he was initially stationed, but he wanted to see the world, so he volunteered for a U.S. military training mission in the desert capitol of Riyadh (now known as Al-Riyadh), Saudi Arabia. It was unique for a draftee to be chosen for such a mission, and Keith's prior midshipman training likely figured into the Army's decision to include him. His tiny unit was all Army, except for one Air Force person, and they were supported by the Air Force out of Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, located on the Arabian (Persian) Gulf. A short-wave radio was used for communication, but reception was somewhat weather dependent.

In those days, there was a real sensitivity about public relations and soldiers were considered "military diplomats."

Although times were tense, Keith says, ninety-five percent of his experiences were very positive. He knew they were there for economic, political, social, as well as cloak-and-dagger reasons. The main reason was to keep oil resources out of the hands of the "Evil Empire"—the Russians. Americans were welcomed, seen as the "good guys" compared to the Communist Russians, who were seen as a threat because of their atheism.

It was an unusual assignment. The Army soldiers were guests of the king, there to provide military training. They carried no weapons, not even pocketknives. They were mostly desk jockeys, helping to set up the Ministry of Defense and Aviation (MODA). They worked in the MODA building and lived in civilian villas on the edge of town.

All the cooking, cleaning and other household chores were carried out by houseboys and cooks, some of whom were Sudanese. The soldiers had heard rumors that the Sudanese hated the Americans' presence in the Muslim Holy Land. One day, while sitting at dinner, a Sudanese waiter suddenly attacked the soldier sitting next to Keith with a butcher knife, making a big slit in his face. Turned out this was not an organized attack, but merely an isolated case of mental instability.

So even though there was not much action in Riyadh, Keith did see blood. He also experienced some fear. He bought a big brass mortar with a brass pestle in the local market. The brass bowl, he says, made a nice bell; the large pestle served as a billy club, and he slept with it under his pillow.

Keith was stationed in Riyadh for one year. It was considered a "hardship" tour because there was no drinking allowed, and no women. But he did make several R&R trips to Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, where there was plenty of each. (At that time, Eritrea was a province of Ethiopia.) Keith also got to visit Lebanon, and he went to the Holy Land before so much of it was occupied by the new Israeli state.

Growing up in rural California, Keith had been pretty sheltered from world politics and racial strife. The travel that his experience in the Army afforded him opened his eyes to many things. In the U.S., he had heard wondrous things about the State of Israel established in the late 1940s: the promised land, a veritable paradise in the middle of the desert. But while stationed in Saudi Arabia, he became friends with many Palestinians (mainly because they spoke English), and heard a different perspective. He learned about the role the U.S. had



Keith Wheeler joined thousands of others to march in Eureka on Saturday, March 18th.



played in arming Israel and carrying out many injustices against the Palestinian people.

When Keith's one-year assignment in Saudi Arabia ended, he was brought home on an American Embassy flight routed through Asia. One thing he recalls from that trip is the "civilian" advisors who changed back into their military uniforms in Thailand after leaving Laos. The plane also touched down in Vietnam; times were too tense in Saigon to even leave the airport.

In 1961, after his discharge, Keith served a couple more years in a reserve unit. He went back to school at Chico State and completed his studies in Psychology, earning both BA and MA degrees. He then worked on staff at Chico in student personnel and teaching psychology, but couldn't get tenure without a doctoral degree, so he packed up his books and moved to Humboldt County to establish "half of the Psychology Department" at College of the Redwoods.

As a psychologist, Keith worked with a lot of veterans who suffered from PTSD and struggled with drug addiction and alcoholism. This was another factor in his becoming a "veteran for peace." He remembers participating in a peace march in downtown Eureka after moving to Humboldt County. Here's a quote from Keith he never would have predicted at that time: "I'd love to have Nixon back now."

In the mid-1970s, Keith dropped out of professional life and became a "back-to-the-land" homesteader. He and his wife Peggy had four children by then (they've been married 40-some-odd years now) and they bought the land in southeastern Humboldt, built a house and barn and raised most of their own food, generating power from the creek, and generally "farmsteaded" for 16 years before re-entering the professional world where Peg taught high school English, Art, and Drama while Keith worked as a clinical counselor until a medical crisis forced early retirement.

Keith has been a lay student of Middle East affairs since living there in 1960-61, and has maintained friendships from that part of the world. Following 9/11, gravely worried about the Bush administration's actions and the blind-like following of the media and general public, he joined online groups like Veterans Against the Iraq War (VAIW) and MoveOn, and attended demonstrations whenever possible. But there was no one of like mind in his neighborhood with whom he could discuss the growing war cloud. Luckily, he had met Bill Thompson through his son Kent, who gardens for Bill, and Kent and Bill suggested he join Humboldt Bay VFP. Keith says, "It made a lot of sense to connect with some folks closer to home working toward the same goal. . . . To me veteran groups do have a bit more credibility and are less easy for folks to write off as just left-wing crazies."

Keith re-experienced Saudi Arabia in 2005 on a trip with his wife, Peg. Al-Riyadh, the small, out-of-the-way desert city just starting to modernize in 1960 (at that time the majority of

buildings were still made of mud bricks) is now a modern megalopolis of somewhere over 5 million people. Although the physical changes are the most obvious, Keith noted that the human, social and political changes are vastly more important and interesting. But these features are much more complex and less easy to describe.

You can read more about Keith and his travels, and see his photos from both 1960 and 2005 on his family website: <<http://www.wheelerfolk.org>>.

STAND DOWN for Humboldt's Homeless Veterans

The North Coast Veterans Resource Center (NCVRC) is in the initial stages of planning a Stand Down in Humboldt County for homeless veterans. A "Stand Down" is a military term used to describe a brief period of rest and recovery from the field of combat to a place of relative safety and security. Homeless veterans continue to "do battle" on our streets. Adversaries of the homeless include lack of shelter, unemployment, physical and mental disabilities, substance abuse and hopelessness. These adversaries create a self-destructive cycle leading to complete withdrawal from mainstream society.

A Stand Down is a three-day event in which an environment is created for homeless veterans where they are treated with respect and given the opportunity to relax, interact and form ties with peers and volunteers while receiving much needed and specific services at one venue. While a Stand Down is not a solution in itself, its primary goals are to:

- provide immediate/temporary relief from the trauma and isolation of homelessness
- provide access to short-term resources
- provide access to long-term resources and providers
- develop community awareness about homelessness, particularly homeless veterans
- encourage ongoing development of longer-term solutions in the community.

Veterans For Peace Chapter 56 has been identified as a veterans group that can provide support in a variety of ways. We urge your membership to let us know where and how they might be willing to help or provide support. The members of this volunteer committee will help facilitate and provide volunteer support to the Stand Down.

We need your help! The homeless veterans in Humboldt, Del Norte and Trinity Counties need your help! Let's bring awareness to our communities and provide an opportunity for our homeless veterans to begin the process of regaining self-esteem, hope, and to reenter the society from which they've withdrawn.



Get Real!

by S. Brian Willson

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This article was drafted on March 21, 2006, the day 41 years ago that MLK, Jr., walked in front of "mob rule" to Selma, Alabama

"What did the Easter Islander who cut down the last palm tree say while he was doing it? Like modern loggers, did he shout 'Jobs, not trees?'"

—Jared Diamond (*Collapse: How Societies Choose To Fail or Succeed*. (N.Y.: Viking, 2005, p. 114)

"'You brood of vipers! Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees.' And the crowds asked him, 'What, then, shall we do?'"

—Sent to me by Andrew Wimmer,
Center for Theology and Social Analysis, St. Louis, Missouri

We, real people, live in a society that we are told is in permanent war, requiring patriotic acquiescence. The war we are told is to be never ending. Who tells us this? Men and women, like us, who we have legitimized in one way or another as Triumphalists selected in a political system describing itself as a "representative democracy."

The Triumphal government is able to pick up people anywhere in the world and detain them in secrecy indefinitely without any evidence, without any legal process. *Our* government can do anything it wants. It wiretaps without warrants. It is now discussing home searches and break-ins without warrants. It maintains a no-fly list. If it can maintain a no-fly list it can create a no-drive list. Even the pretense of "democracy," *if* we ever had one, is gone.

We, real people, pay taxes to the Triumphalists. We cast votes for one or the other of them based on some old habit. We drive our cars anywhere we want thanks to fuel resources protected by our military forces located all over the world. We consume products made by corporations protected by the Triumphalists. We go about our business as usual, day after day.

We are allowed to participate in occasional marches and rallies; sign numerous on-line petitions; make calls, send faxes and emails to our "representatives" in the Triumphalist government. Rumsfeld, Rice, Cheney, Bush II The Younger, etc., all rave about *our* free speech protected by *their* war of terror on terror.

GET REAL!

For how much longer will we go about our business as usual, occasionally attending a peace march, signing one more petition, making one more phone call, without serious

examining our own lifestyle choices?

Slavoj Zizek, a Slovenian philosopher and psychoanalyst, has described September 11, 2001, as a moment when the people in the United States of Amnesia were introduced to the "desert of the real." If we listen carefully we have an opportunity to experience ("feel") a taste of what goes on around the world in our names on a daily basis, and has been going on for the past five centuries. The relative prosperity of the "civilized" west was purchased by export of barbaric violence, impoverishing and/or murdering 80 percent of the world's people, all with total impunity.

When discussion about Nazi Germany has come up in conversations we often said, "It can't happen here." Well, it is happening! And, meanwhile, the issues that imminently threaten our survival—stem from *our* wholesale terrorism protecting *our* 4.5 percent of the world's population consuming perhaps a third of the world's resources, *our* lifestyle contaminating and destabilizing the Planet leading to *our own* species' extinction, etc.—are ignored. Why? Well, because, uh,...well, because *we* insist on business as usual. We pay our taxes, we drive to work, we eat food from 1,500 miles away, even as we do half-day marches, sign petitions and call our Congressperson. Yes, *we* people of goodwill continue doing what we have been taught. We are good.

GET REAL!

After 500 years of conquest the Zapatista Mayan Indians in Chiapas chose to revolt. They decided to refuse compliance with "representative democracy" which, in effect, was destroying them. They describe it as an oxymoron. Democracy must be direct, radical, they say, only possible in small groups. They are embarking on what they call the non-electoral "Other Campaign," building a grassroots, town-to-town national anti-capitalist struggle. They are not afraid to die in the struggle. Dignity trumps longevity. These people are getting real. Compassion is at the root of justice, justice at the root of security. The Zapatistas are for real. They *know* they have no dignified alternative!

In November 1967 Martin Luther King Jr. was released from his five-day jail sentence in Birmingham, Alabama. He announced plans for a massive tent city, a "Poor People's Campaign" to create "Resurrection City" of at least 100,000 people permanently encamped in Washington, D.C. The plan was to begin in May 1968, and the people were to remain until the Vietnam war was terminated and all war funds re-directed to social programs. This was a different action because it was to be *permanent*.

March 4, 1968, exactly one month before King's assassination, J. Edgar Hoover wrote a memo identifying FBI COINTELPRO goals against "Black Nationalist Hate-Groups": "1. Prevent the coalition of militant black nationalist groups..., the beginning of a true black revolution. 2. Prevent



the rise of a 'messiah' who could unify, and electrify, the militant black nationalist movement...King could be a very real contender for this position should he abandon his supposed 'obedience' to 'white, liberal doctrines' (nonviolence) and embrace black nationalism... 3. Prevent violence...[and] pinpoint potential troublemakers and neutralize them..."

James Lawson, one of King's cohorts at the time, today the Pastor Emeritus at Holman United Methodist Church in Los Angeles, has speculated that King's plans for a permanent presence of thousands in Washington instilled so much fear in the minds of the Triumphalists they chose to eliminate the "messiah troublemaker."

I was reminded at the time just how dangerous this man was. In my position as a security officer at headquarters U.S. Air Force in Washington D.C. in 1968 I was briefed about dispatching the military to contain any serious encampment despite the provisions of the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 that prohibited use of military forces for domestic law enforcement purposes.

Yes, indeed, King was getting real about provoking structural change, and the Triumphalists were feeling the heat. They were terrified by real free speech.

GETTING REAL. Together, with dignity and imagination, we are capable of NO MORE business as usual. We need to create heat, and not the kind that adds to global warming.

Wouldn't it be exciting to be part of regular salons in our living rooms discussing where we go from here while eating potluck meals? We could create film nights for public education. We can choose to use less domestic electricity each day, to buy only from local businesses while consciously reducing our actual consumption needs, and to buy used rather than new. We can choose to consciously reduce our petroleum dependency by re-examining our transportation habits. We can strive to live on a 200-mile diet, eating organic food originating within 200 miles of where we live. Each of us could fast one day a week. We can choose to begin serious, serious tax refusal and discuss how we are going to do it. More of us could stand in silence one hour a week on the Arcata Plaza and Eureka Courthouse lawn. And, get this, we could actually begin thinking about taking turns in maintaining a *permanent* presence in those locations.

The unifying principle is to rediscover the culture of local steady-state economies, the social organization that sustained humanity for our first 99.9 percent of our life as Hominids. Communities need to be re-established, reducing dependency upon external inputs. It just so happens that all who are reading this were born and raised in a tiny blip in history dominated by the incredible energy source of oil that has shaped and designed virtually all of our living, buying, working, and thinking patterns. The cheap energy source is on its way out. But we have become addicted to a way of life that in turn is

SUNDAY, APRIL 9

Michael Parenti Speaks in Arcata

Internationally known award-winning author and lecturer Michael Parenti comes to Arcata on Sunday, April 9th to talk about his latest book, *The Culture Struggle*. A **reception with the author** will be held at **3:30 at the Redwood Peace & Justice Center**, 1040 H Street in Arcata, followed by a **speaking event at 7pm at the D Street Neighborhood Center**, near the corner of D & 14th Streets. Admission to the talk is \$5 to \$20 sliding-scale. Proceeds will benefit the RPJC. Parenti's latest book, *The Culture Struggle*, will be available for purchase and signing at both events.

Michael Parenti is one of the nation's leading progressive political analysts. His highly informative and entertaining books and talks have reached a wide range of audiences in North America and abroad. In *The Culture Struggle*, Parenti demonstrates that beliefs and practices are readily subjected to political manipulation, and that cultures are instruments of social power. Art, science, medicine, psychiatry, and even marriage have been used as instruments of cultural control across the centuries. Powerful interests also employ racism, sexism, and class supremacy to maintain their existing politico-economic rule. Culture is both something to be contained and itself an instrument of domination.

addicted to war to assure that business remains as usual—highly consumptive, toxic-producing, soul destroying, ecosystem destabilizing. The consequences have been staggeringly destructive and immoral but we have been taught *not* to see or consider them.

The political and economic structures we have created are not designed to be sustainable or just. They are designed to make profits for a few at the expense of the many. Those of us who grew up between post-WWII and the mid-1970s, "enjoyed" the only substantial middle class period in our entire history—another blip within the oil age, but terribly dependent upon exploitation of others under the policy of "plausible deniability."

Now it is our turn to become fully conscious, to participate creatively in the remainder of our human evolutionary journey. We can choose to re-create local community while withdrawing further support for a system that we know is, in reality, our *unmaking*. We have only one other choice: remain complicit with our addictions knowing they will eventually destroy us.



Resolved, that George Walker Bush, President of the United States, is Impeached for High Crimes and Misdemeanors

by Jack Nounnan

No matter how much we deliberate, rant, get certain comic relief or exhaust ourselves over the debacle of this administration, we still have not narrowed down to our objective. Simplicity is vital, and when cumulative, like a river ceaselessly flowing.

A Republican senator who is outraged with Bush's behavior on CNN and asking for accountability, scurries away and hides when confronted by the host asking, "You're saying he ought to be impeached. Is that not right?" And the Senators answer is, "You're putting words in my mouth. I'm only asking for an investigation." In fact, the idea of censoring Bush has emerged, some kind of slap on the hand rather than the real thing. Censoring and deliberations stop nothing and this administration knows it all too well. Do we?

Politicians will never have our respect and will never submit until they know we mean it! They need our marching orders, for they cannot be counted on to know our feelings, our true motives. They know of our frustrations and energy being exhausted, how stretched we are, even though they lack the compassion to comprehend the trials of our lives. Whatever

they see, our protests fit neatly within their damage control.

They seem to have lost track of their ability to sense what we want and what we go through, the rage of it let loose in the turmoil it creates in our lives. They are almost as irresponsible as this administration they feed. Care and discretion, at least shown some during World War II, has almost altogether lost any legitimacy and integrity. And we know so-called enemies have always suffered the ultimate sacrifice at the hands of those who see perpetuation of war as some kind of answer to perpetual, violent, high crimes.

Impeachment is spoken of, but lacks the will of greater numbers of people prepared to see the immensity of this situation, to see how it allows these hideous results when simply allowed to go on. Finding the tenacity to go forward now is somehow illusive. Why is this? Why are we not talking up our abilities to simplify our objectives and get to the source of our problems? Why are we hesitant now to impeach this man and his entire administration? Do we feel they would not sense the mood and determination of our will? Will anything less get us their attention and get us what we must achieve?

Dismantling our Terror

An appeal from Livermore Conversion Project and the Ecumenical Peace Institute

Submitted by June Thompson

For more than twenty years, people of faith and others concerned about nuclear weapons have gathered on Good Friday for prayer and witness outside the Livermore Nuclear Weapons Laboratory.

It is time we, as a world, dismantle our weapons of terror, so that we may dismantle the culture of fear used by our national governments to escalate the violence and development of tool of violence. We have seen this cycle before, and we know it doesn't serve humanity or the planet. We want more from our world.

The US government's weapons are used to control the world, and our culture of fear is used to control the citizens of the U.S.—used to control us from stopping the continuation of global violence.

Our witness is a foreign policy decision and a domestic policy decision. We believe we are safer when no one—even us—has weapons of mass destruction. We also believe that our nation's tax money and intellectual resources can be better spent rebuilding the Gulf Coast, funding public education, establishing national health care, creating affordable housing, and researching alternative energy sources, than in building more and more weapons.

We, as global citizens in solidarity with our kin in Iraq, in Iran, in Israel, in Palestine, in Japan, in the Marshall Islands, and all over the world, feel responsible to voice our fear of and our protest against this nuclear madness:

- We fear the nuclear weapons themselves. We are all potential victims of

their terrible violence.

- We fear the ecological and environmental health effects of nuclear technology, on lab workers and neighboring communities as well as on victims of weapons used.

- We fear the waste of domestic resources, of money, energy, and talent, on tools of violence instead of healing the wounds of an already broken world.

- We fear our unacknowledged guilt as U.S. Americans, for what we have done and what we are doing to the world.

- We fear the perpetuation of the U.S. Empire, of which nuclear weaponry is but one element, and the Empire's unsustainable and oppressive relationship to the world.

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

by Joe Balsamo

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

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

And I say the same thing to the arrogant leaders of our country who wage war on other nations and say we need to be in the Middle East for decades to "stabilize the area." It amazes me that people

Dismantling Our Terror

...cont'd from page 6

- We are already victims of having to live in a world where we fear each other and our human potential, instead of loving each other and celebrating our power as human co-creators with God. We intend to start dismantling our terror.

We will gather in Livermore on Good Friday, April 14, at the corner of Vasco Road and Patterson Pass Road. We will gather at 6:45 a.m. for a service at 7:00, followed by a procession to the gates and the opportunity for nonviolent civil disobedience.

In order to make this event a success, individuals and organizations are invited to co-sponsor this year's Good Friday event by making a contribution to help cover expenses. Checks may be written to Ecumenical Peace Institute and sent to P.O. Box 9334, Berkeley, CA 94709.

NOTE: June Thompson has asked that VFP Chapter 56 consider making a donation to the Ecumenical Peace Institute for the ongoing peace and justice work of EPI and LCP. This will be on the agenda at our April 6th meeting.

who haven't actually served in the military, during peace or war, are making decisions concerning whether young men and women "should die for their country."

Many of these warmongers, who are sending us to war for God knows what reason, have never faced the reality of death. Bush, Cheney, and their cronies have no idea. Nor do their children or their relatives and friends. They were all born with silver spoons, in the privileged class who prey on the poor and send them off to kill for their own greedy ends.

I have been there, done that. During my tour in Vietnam, I held little children with their bodies burned to a crisp, and saw men and women with limbs blown off, blind, dying, demented. I once held a dying 16-year-old American soldier's head while his brains slipped through my fingers onto the ground. And what did our soldiers and their civilians suffer and die for? Anyone have a clue?

I served in the Vietnam War from 1966 to 1970. I joined up when I was 24 years old because I was about to be drafted. I didn't think it was the right thing to do, but felt I had no choice. I had always been taught that if your country called

you, you did not question; you served. I have since become proud of those who had the courage to resist the draft or went to Canada.

Now the same thing is going on in Iraq. Over 100,000 innocent Iraqi men, women, and children were killed by us because they were "collateral." We pretty well wiped out the city of Fallujah because it harbored "terrorists." And yet again, we're talking about dropping a nuclear bomb on Iran—as if this is a casual, everyday decision, like going to the corner store to pick up groceries.

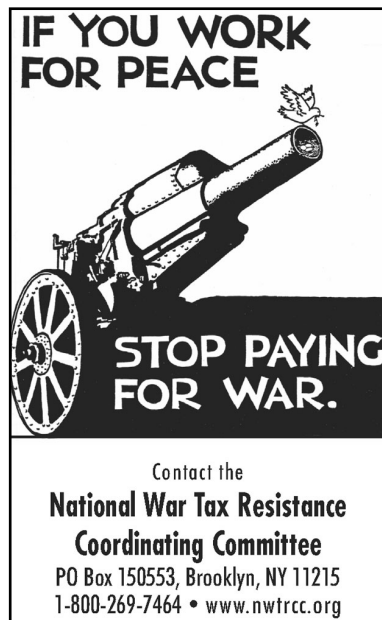
Folks, our leaders are discussing murdering people, and they call other people terrorists. Isn't it about time we analyze what's going on and question who has the right to make these decisions? It is said, "We reap what we sow." How are we going to justify our tolerance for and lack of protest against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

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

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

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

Joe Balsamo is a member of Veterans for Peace, Taos Chapter!





**Veterans For Peace
Chapter 56**

**NEW Phone: 707-822-4975
Email: VFP56@aol.com**

**WE'RE ON THE WEB!
<http://www.vfp56.org>**

**COORDINATING
COMMITTEE**

**Steve Stamnes Rob Hepburn
Nate Lomba Linda Sorter
Jim Sorter Gordon Anderson**

**STANDING
COMMITTEES**

**WMD/DU: Peter Aronson
General Store: Doug Smith
Media: Becky Luening
VEOP: Laura Simpson
Carl Stancil**

LET US HEAR FROM YOU!

If you would like to submit an article, opinion, comment or response to anything you have read that might interest the members of VFP-56, please email it to turtldncer@aol.com in Word format, or mail to Jim Sorter at 1762 Buttermilk Lane, Arcata, CA 95521. Submissions will be included on a first come basis until the newsletter is full. Late arriving submissions will be archived for future issues.



March 18, 2006 Peace March (L to R): John Calkins, Rob Hepburn, John Mulloy and Nate Lomba.
PHOTO: Don Maddox



**Veterans For Peace Chapter 56
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