



VETERANS FOR PEACE  
HUMBOLDT BAY  
CHAPTER 56

# THE FOGHORN

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*“Cutting Through the Fog of War”*

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## Theater Review: Jason In Eureka

*By: Dave Berman*

“Vets talk to vets,” said Dennis, a somewhat mysterious, soft-spoken, and seemingly wise veteran portrayed by VFP-56 member Rob Hepburn in the Cornerstone Theater Company’s Jason in Eureka. The compassion of Dennis, and his unique ability to communicate with the troubled Jason, enabled other characters to accept the presence of Jason, who appeared to them as a mute trespasser sleeping in the yard of strangers contending with an array of neighborhood issues.

The 100-minute play ran just three nights at Eureka’s historic Blue Ox Millworks in early August, though playwright Peter Howard spent eight months immersed in our community, hearing the stories, learning the histories, and ultimately weaving the perspectives of many different local constituencies into this adaptation of the Greek myth Jason and the Golden Fleece.

As the story began, an unemployed millworker and his Wiyot wife inherit one of Eureka’s historic Victorian houses, raising the question of whether to sell it or restore it. In an interview days before the show opened, Howard told me in a video interview how amazed he was to discover local preservationists driven far less by concerns of affluence and much more by genuine green thinking (see [ManifestPositivity.org](http://ManifestPositivity.org) for more of the playwright’s insights, plus separate interview footage with Rob).

The “houseless” Jason’s unwelcome camping confounded matters as the young new homeowners were unable to communicate with the warrior, whose mind was revealed to the audience in scenes of travels and battles wherein we learned of his rightful claim to a throne, alliances with gods, goddesses and other heroes, and ultimately his quest to heal.

Throughout the performance the scene shifted from historic Eureka to mythical times, tied together by readings from Charles Kingsley’s “The Heroes,” one of many treasured books left behind in the inherited house, and the actual source being adapted for the play. There were only a few songs in the production, yielding outstanding singing performances by Michele Denise Michaels as both Orpheus, and the Minister in the play’s opening funeral scene, as well as the barbershop quartet Mirth First, featuring Blue Ox’s Eric Hollenbeck.

The pivotal role of Dennis provided the means to educate the audience about not only the challenges a veteran has in readjusting to civilian life, but also veteran-run assistance efforts such as Incopah and Stand Down, the latter a tactic Dennis initiated with the help of a child and some senior citizens.

Both serious and at times funny, Jason In Eureka was a major accomplishment for all involved. While Jason was the story’s hero, Dennis was Jason’s hero, doing our organization proud with a clear and powerful message delivered from beneath a VFP beret. *Way to go, Rob. Well done!*



## GI Resistance Under the Radar

By: Sarah Lazare, *t r u t h o u t* | Perspective

An interview with two former soldiers who describe how they helped prevent their unit from deploying to a war zone.

What do you do if you are a soldier being asked to fight a war you do not believe in? For two former soldiers whose unit was ordered to deploy to Iraq in April 2005, the answer came in the form of work slowdowns, letter-writing campaigns, and one-on-one organizing with fellow soldiers. The result: they helped prevent their unit from deploying to a war zone.

In this interview, Skippy and Robert, who did not give their full names for fear of military retaliation, share their stories, telling how they convinced several in their unit to deliberately fail physical training, called public attention to the insufficient training and gear they were being asked to fight with, and found creative ways to encourage soldiers to “drop the military before the military drops you.” They tell how they dealt with the fear and intimidation of standing up to their command, and about friends and comrades who fell victim to “broken Joe” syndrome.

These stories give a glimpse into the world of GI resistance the oft-hidden side of the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. While the military is not forthcoming with information about the number of troops refusing to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan, statistics suggest military resistance overall is on the rise. Since 2002, the Army has court-martialed twice as many soldiers for desertion and other unauthorized absences per year than for each year between 1997 and 2001. AWOL rates in the Army are at their highest since 1980, with the desertion rate having jumped 80 percent since the start of the Iraq War, according to The Associated Press.

Skippy and Robert’s experience shows that while some GI resisters go public, much resistance happens silently, under the radar, in circles of trusted friends, in the small acts that fly in the face of military obedience and command. Their stories serve as a reminder that there are multiple ways to resist military control, and despite military efforts to quash dissent, these varied forms of resistance are as ongoing as the wars themselves.

Sarah: I know that you two were involved in an unconventional form of GI resistance where you essentially ... organized your unit not to deploy to Iraq. Can you tell me the story of how that happened?

Robert: Sure; we were in Fort Polk, Louisiana, in an area called “the box,” which is a large training area that is meant to resemble different areas of Iraq or Afghanistan. They basically employ civilians from outside the base and bring in interpreters to try to make a realistic training situation. We were training to go in and basically rebuild UN AID, which is military assistance to the United Nations

operations. It can be very dangerous, because the Rules of Engagement that govern soldiers under the command of the UN are very limiting and create fear because they are unrealistic in the battlefield - they’ll get you killed.

We weren’t as a unit prepared for that, and that’s where Skippy and I started to look for other actions. We were against the war and were hoping just to ride out the rest of our military career. We both knew that after that deployment, by the time the next deployment came up, we’d be getting out. As we started to gear up for going to Iraq we started to explore actions for getting out of the military. Skippy went towards a hardship discharge, and I went conscientious objector. And basically you could say we agitated several other soldiers to take other means to get out of the military.

Skippy: As concerned citizens and concerned soldiers, we were looking at the situation in front of us and saying, you know, this just doesn’t seem right to us. And so we started to talk to our fellow soldiers about this to get a sense of, “are we alone on this, what’s going on,” and we did quickly realize that everybody else had the same kinds of feelings as us. They either felt that there was something really fishy about the war, in general, or particular, they would start to say that our leadership was incompetent, that we’re totally dependent upon a leadership that obviously doesn’t know what they’re doing.

The other thing was we didn’t even have the proper equipment to train, let alone mobilize. So it was like, “hey, here’s this super dangerous mission, how about let’s mobilize the guard for it, they’ve been in the box for a while, they might be able to handle this.” But the reality was, we totally couldn’t handle something like that, and we were actually struggling to do a good job in “the box” in my opinion.

So we endeavored to talk to our fellow soldiers, and we told them to call their parents and let them know what was going on and complain about it. So that’s where the letter-writing campaign really came in handy, and the parents are really the backbone of this whole thing. Rob, maybe this is a good time to go into how you helped set up initially that conference call with Dick Durbin, senator from Illinois.

Robert: Ok, sure. So it was set up by my fiancée, who was working with different groups who were doing antiwar work, and they

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**NEXT VFP 56  
MEETING IS  
SCHEDULED FOR SEPT.  
3RD, 7:00 PM 843  
EIGHTH STREET IN  
EUREKA**



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were able to set up a conference call, and basically we carried forth some of the demands of the soldiers there. You know, complaints about no body armor, our leadership was absolutely horrible - for example, in our infantry unit, our sergeant major had been a cook his entire military career.

Same thing with our company commander, who was absolutely horrible - there was no confidence, at least within our platoon, in his ability. You know, within the military it's very interesting, because you have a lot of the lower enlisted, you could say, specialists and below, basically people who aren't in a leadership position, for the most part coming from working-class communities. The military was a way to advance. For them it was pretty easy to get in discussions in which we were able to challenge the concept of authoritarianism a little bit. So we did seek out senators to help us, including Durbin and to my understanding other letters went to Obama, but we also sought self-empowerment amongst everyday enlisted soldiers. Within our platoon, if not at that deployment, shortly after, when we returned from Fort Polk, we had about seven people who sought some form of discharge, and that's almost an entire squad in a platoon. Within a platoon, you have four squads. For us I think it was a pretty big victory.

Skippy: It was during kind of this dialogue phase, we would cut out the various pictures in the magazines and we'd make these flyers and we'd put them up as another sign of resistance. Initially I think we would just distribute them in random places. I actually found this advertisement for the National Guard from way back when, and it was a guy's head yellin' "hoo-wah" so I cut his head out with the hoo-wah phrase kind of echoing from his mouth and I put it in the center of the toilet. We cut out these letters you know so that it says "drop the Mili before the Mili drops you."

It's really strange in the military, you almost feel like you shouldn't do these things, because somebody might catch you, but then when you start talking to people, it's like they have the same ideas that you do, in a way, so it's like you find yourself in this weird position where you feel like you're alienated but then there's signs that maybe you're not. So we wanted to create another sign to say that you're not.

Sarah: The latest study that was done, which was in 2006, showed that 72 percent of all the troops in Iraq are against the war and want immediate pullout. Do you think there was an organic natural sentiment against the war or at least skepticism within the ranks?

Skippy: I guess from my humble perspective it did seem like that was out there and a lot of that had to do with what people were getting from the news, mixed with what they actually saw on the ground. Since we were in a training scenario, it was a little different for us, because we weren't actually in country. We were just in Fort Polk, Louisiana. But I think the premise is the same because we were out there trying to mimic what was going on in country, so a lot of our missions would be very similar to what missions were like over there. So we could still connect the dots in a similar way.

Sometimes people would understand that a lot of the training scenario just seemed really bizarre in and of itself. We would play the bad guys some rotations and then we would play the good guys some rotations, so we would really get this juxtaposition of perspectives.

So when we did eventually engage in dialogue at chow or whatever, or when we were in down time, talked about how messed up would it be to go over there, how unfair that would be, how ridiculous this scenario was, etc. It starts to click together that all that's really going on is that there's this deep network of factions warring and backstabbing each other while we get caught in the middle. Folks didn't really want to be a part of that.

It reminds me a lot of how people felt about isolationism; it's like an isolationist kind of perspective. Like, "Well, what's our business over there, why is that our responsibility" kind of thing, like; "Why can't they just deal with their own issues." But Robert and I were relatively enlightened on these matters. At least in our small circle of influence, were able to put out the idea that this is sort of systemic. We'd make sure to point out that this has deep roots in capitalism and history, and that these are patterns that extend between nations and over time, and so we were kind of bringing that flavor to it.

Maybe it helped, maybe it didn't, I don't know, but I know folks really did begin to pick up the idea that they could resist. We did do something akin to a slow-down strike. I know personally I did encourage troops to not qualify as best as they could. When you get mobilized you have to qualify with your weapons and that kind of thing and we realized that we were just so ate up anyway that it really didn't matter anyway how well we did on these things because it's not going to really accurately reflect who we are. Our rationale was to just do the bare minimum, don't try to prop up what we look like on paper any more than it's already distorted.

It was kind of scary because we didn't want to publicly broadcast that we were doing these things to anybody, but we wanted to make sure that it was kept within like teams or squads, so I don't know how far it did get out. Then there were soldiers who were not too motivated necessarily against the war. For example, this one guy, you know that wasn't his big thing, I don't think that was really even on his mind, but his thing was, he just hated the military, and he wasn't gonna try.

There's this peculiar broken Joe syndrome you could call it, it's like where folks kind of see the despair already so they just kind of reiterate it in their own individual ways. It's like "Oh well, like the war is bullshit anyway it's not as if it's legitimate and I can feel ashamed, it's actually illegitimate and I can feel proud to dog it."

Sarah: Can you talk about the outcome of your organizing and what happened? You ended up not having to deploy, right?

Robert: Skippy got out on a hardship discharge for family-re-

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*GI Resistance Under The Radar: Continued from page 3*

laxed reasons. I went out on conscientious objection; once the investigation started, things went really sour. Two weeks after I went conscientious objector, somebody else from another platoon within our company went conscientious objector too. I think they were kind of fearing that people are really looking for a way out. While we were there within our platoon, one or two people got out for drug-related reasons. Afterwards two more got out for the same reason. They would kick people out for, say, smoking pot. People would be like, well, do I stay in the military and go to war or smoke some pot?

After I left, I don't think there was a lot of momentum left within resisting; it was hard to have other people take initiative and be a strong voice against it. I'm not sure exactly how strong that sentiment against the military is within our old unit, but when we got back, about a year or two years after, there were people getting out or finding ways to get out. So that continued for sure, and then there were people who would have re-upped and stayed in the military decided not to.

Sarah: So the letter-writing campaign played some kind of role, in at least pressuring the military to not deploy you all; could you explain a little bit about that?

Robert: We don't know 100 percent if that's exactly the case. So the letters go in and we get a meeting at Durbin's office and we're basically on video cameras with some of his representatives in DC. I believe that there was around 2,000 letters sent out within a week, so for them it was probably like "OK, why are we getting hit with so many letters, what's going on, it's something we'll probably have to address." And then within our company and battalion, basically our entire leadership was constantly being brought out on these meetings, there was definitely a lot that was going on, you'd hear people talking about the letter campaign.

Skippy: Remember that time we came back on leave and then they put the whole battalion into formation? They were like "who's writing, whose calling back home telling their family that the weapons are broken and the unit's messed up?" And meanwhile we're just standing there like [muffled laughter].

Robert: They brought a company in at a time to a church, and then they gave everyone an hour-long speech on how the unit is prepared, how you're not supposed to be calling home about this stuff, you have a chain of command, don't go writing home. Sergeant Major the cook, who all of a sudden became infantry, he was like you know, "When I call home I tell my wife I have a good weapon and I'm prepared to use it and I know how to use it. And I'll be safe." And I'm thinking well, maybe you have a weapon, but we don't have a weapon.

I was on CQ duty, which is, basically within the company they have a headquarters and the CQ sits there, you're at the desk if they need you to do something, you'll do it. It's a 24-hour watch, so I'd kind of hear what's going on with the other companies and they'd

have their battalion meetings in there. And they'd be like "We've got to find out whose doing this," and I'm just sitting there like "Oh man, I know who it is."

Skippy: I believe there's another component to it. Remember when Private Joe shot himself in the guard tower? Private Joe was in another company, but in the same battalion. He had a lot of mental issues. He had gone to the Army shrink and everything, and for whatever reason they told him he was fine. So he's on guard duty in this guard shack and he convinces the other soldier to go grab the sergeant for something. Then he puts the barrel of his weapon into his mouth and blows the back of his brains all over the guard shack. So when Private Joe shot himself, that's when all of the leadership just went apeshit, I don't know how, maybe that played a factor too in our getting denied the deployment as well. I remember distinctly the next day being appalled by just the regularity of the military machine and it just not giving a damn about Private Joe for one second. It was almost like it was a joke to them, and they cleaned it up and everything marched right on; it was very surreal. They did eventually honor him and say something, but it took a while; it wasn't like an immediate concern of theirs, it seemed.

Robert: When you go conscientious objector the first thing you have to do is announce it; you have to tell your company commander. I was supposed to get promoted to sergeant like the next day and that got scrapped. The second part is you basically have to state your beliefs or reasons, motives of why you're going conscientious objector, and then you have to see the chaplain and then from there you have to see a psychologist. Then you have almost like a hearing within your company, with an outside company commander. In general I was trying to get basically diagnosed as having depression and anxiety. So the process says you have to first go to see the chaplain, which is interesting because on one hand it's a party that's outside of your chain of command, but at the same time it's also a chaplain, so if you're not very religious or whatever or a different religion, who really wants to go talk to a chaplain? I didn't. Then I tried to see a private psychologist, and I was able to see one in Chicago and basically was able to have myself diagnosed.

Skippy: A lot of the depression, I think, was real. You were close to broken Joe syndrome as well.

Sarah: Skippy, you were out already on hardship discharge when you heard that your unit was not going to be deploying, right? Skippy: Yeah, I was long gone. It was in March 2005 that I officially got out. When I heard the news from Rob, I guess even then I really didn't kind of connect our resistance with the canceled deployment, because what we were doing kind of felt more instinctual than anything. A lot of our resistance just kind of felt like the thing that we should do at the time. Even though we did kind of have a broad articulated strategy between each other and amongst some sympathizers, it still felt like anything could happen at any moment. The atmosphere was totally precarious, and the uncertainty just made all of us so anxious. I remember Rob and I were coming up with just alternatives; we had like 100 alternative plans, like "If this goes

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wrong, if the other thing goes wrong ...” I remember us just revisiting it to each other constantly and now it just reminds me of how anxious we really were and how scary everything really was. So it was definitely a sigh of relief but really hard to put what caused it into a direct line.

Sarah: What do you hope GI’s and the peace and antiwar movement can learn from your experience?^

Robert: My reasons for going into the military were, I had a 1.9 GPA in high school, and right now, next semester at school I’ll be student-teaching to fulfill the requirements to become a history teacher. But when I was younger I had no confidence in myself. I came from a working-class family, my dad worked at the post office and was a Nam vet, in the infantry. That was the reason I didn’t at that time go active Army, but I had considered it. But looking back at it, there’s a feeling of wanting to get ahead, of wanting to not be in such a precarious situation that my family was in. Not that we were poor, but we basically just got by. With having a 1.9 GPA in high school I was just wondering what I was going to do with myself. My parents can’t afford to put me in school, so what I’m seeing in my future is just getting by, just working your ass off so hopefully you could retire.

So I looked at the military as a way of basically thinking that it would solve my problems. Whether you go in the military or not, the situation’s gonna remain the same. There’s much broader and larger economic forces at play.

So then from there it’s like, who are you fighting for? Who is benefiting from Iraq? And then I think from there the question is, do you have agency in your life; are you empowered? You know, was my family empowered at work, in our community? In short, there’s no running away from these authoritarian social relationships, and if you really want to make things better in your community then you have to take part in community struggle. And you have to take part in struggle at your job. I think that whether or not they’re in the military, people need a sense of agency and empowerment.

If you look at WWII, and you ask people who were flipping the switches at Auschwitz, they say they were just following orders. It’s a common thing in the military to say, “Hey, I’m just following orders, I’m just a soldier,” and that’s not the truth. You can determine what you’re gonna do, you can take control of your life and you can do something. What fascinates me about history is if you look at pictures of the civil rights movement and you look at the National Guard’s original role, it was breaking the strike movement. Shooting striking families, you know like literally mowing them down with machine guns. Of course the assumption is you’re just following orders. So if a soldier wants to question or a soldier’s opposed to war, then they need to find, or should be encouraged to find, ways to resist. You need to take control of your own situation, to take control of your life, or somebody who really doesn’t care anything about you is going to control your situation and they’re going to control your life. You have to take some accountability

for what you’re gonna do and stop just following orders and being some drone or little duck in a row.

Skippy: Echoing what Robert was saying, I certainly agree with the agency part and I certainly think that’s the best message to get to GI’s right now. To question everything and be critical; the trend in the military is to not be critical. In order to survive properly, you actually have to be very critical. That’s the biggest one piece of advice I could or would give any soldier or GI in the military now. And then the second would be, you have to investigate different ways to get out of the military, and encourage others to get out of the military. You can do similar things that we talked about here today, which is just to slow down things, talk to your fellow soldiers, and just begin to realize that you’re not alone in that sentiment and you can do something to get out of the situation.

I think that the peace movement can learn a lot from what we’ve said here, because they have a really important role to be playing that they seem to want to play, but really haven’t articulated. In our little micro-scenario, you could say those parents who wrote letters were part of the antiwar movement just in that brief instance of time and space. They represented what a lot of people are trying to replicate in different places at different times. So it’s really just about finding those opportunities for people to resist and then supporting them 100-110 percent all the way and responding to their needs and trying to play an auxiliary force to what the troops want. It’s hard to communicate to the troops because they’re either in country or on leave. If you can get veteran groups, I think antiwar movement people - if they’re serious about antiwar - they would volunteer or get involved with organizations that are already formed for that purpose. Why reinvent the wheel when this stuff’s been tried a lot? We also need to get our heads together to come up with new and surprising projects and tactics.

*Sarah Lazare is project coordinator for Courage to Resist.*

## VFP 56 Fundraiser

The date is drawing near! Shine up those dancing shoes, start tapping your feet! Saturday, September 12, 2009 8:00pm to 11:00pm @Arcata Veterans Memorial Building Humboldt County and Vets co-sponsoring Dance. Join us Peace!



A few volunteers are still needed at the dance. We need a few more bakers to make tasty baked goods to sell at the dance. To offer your help or for more info call or email Judi Rose. 822-2142 rosebuds@humboldt1.com



## At The Last Meeting...

By: Dave Berman  
8/6/09

At the August VFP-56 meeting, we discussed many current and upcoming activities Foghorn readers may want to join. Marc Knipper reported he is now privately brokering veterans to needed services, even as the Veterans Spirit program continues to develop in conjunction with Willow Creek host site, Incopah, whose Board has dwindled to three people. New volunteer Board members are needed, as are components of the outdoor kitchen being built (stove, sinks, building materials; plus tents or other shelters). Peter Aronson shared a notice from the Santa Barbara VFP chapter offering medical and legal support for vets exposed to depleted uranium. Citing success at other VFP chapters, John Reisdorf reiterated the interest of the VEOP committee (Veterans Education and Outreach Program) in a writing contest. The FEM committee (fundraising/events/media) is keen to work with VEOP on this, and has laid some groundwork for possibly collaborating with WILPF. Judi Rose is on top of the folk dance fundraiser scheduled for Sept. 12 at the Arcata Vets Hall, though we need more volunteers to bake goods for sale at the concession stand. Mashaw McGuinnis confirmed the annual VFP yard sale fundraiser will return to the vacant lot at 15th and G Streets in Arcata on Sept. 19-20. Gently used items may be donated for sale at that time and location, or in advance by private arrangement with Bill Thompson (707-822-5847). Mashaw still has some holes to fill in the volunteer sign-up grid so please e-mail if you can help (hippiemash@yahoo.com). The VFP film festival has been confirmed for 5-10pm on Nov. 3 at the Arcata Theatre Lounge (more details in the next Foghorn). Meanwhile save that date and Nov. 5 when the monthly chapter meeting will be in the Kate Buchanan Room at HSU. Nate Lomba shared the good news that Eureka and Arcata are both on board appealing the invalidation of Measures F and J, and the pro bono lawyers on our side have agreed to cover court costs as well as legal fees. Members signed a letter of thanks written to the lawyers by Win Sample. Nate also passed out info on volunteer opportunities for the 4th Annual North Coast Stand Down, scheduled for Oct. 2-4. Contact Jennifer Fusaro for more info (707-826-6272). Ernie Behm invited VFP members and families to a Labor Day picnic at Sequoia Park presented by the Central Labor Council of Humboldt and Del Norte Counties, AFL/CIO. The event is from Noon-3pm and admission is a donated canned food item.

**REMEMBER THE YARD SALE COMING UP ON SEPTEMBER 19-20 AT THE LOT ON 15TH AND G STREETS IN ARCATA. ITEMS MAY BE STORED AT BILL THOMPSON'S 707-822-5847 UNTIL THE MORNING OF THE SALE, OR THEY MAY BE BROUGHT TO THE 15TH AND G LOT ON THE MORNING OF THE SALE.**

## Local Veteran Does Outreach for the Stand Down

By: Mashaw McGuinnis

"I'm too young to be a Viet Nam war vet, but I am old enough to remember how they were treated when they returned" recalls Rob Ash of Eureka, a U.S. army veteran in his 40's. "All those people who cheered them going off to war, but then turned their backs on them when they returned". That was one memory that inspired him to take on the challenge of being an outreach coordinator for the annual North Coast Stand Down. He feels compelled to give back to those who served. After all Rob's four years of military service allowed him to receive a G.I. bill which helped fund his college education. But he never planned on calling upon his experience to help vets connect with other vets.

"We really want to bring a lot of vets together" he tells me, "it's a big misconception that the Stand Down is only for homeless vets. It's for all vets to come together on common ground". While coordinating the outreach to veterans in Humboldt County, he hands out fliers, informational cards gets the added benefit of meeting veterans from all walks of life. "You get to know them on a personal level and hear a lot of their stories" he says.

But probably one of the best things about working at the Stand Down is seeing veterans from different social and economic situations coming together. "Vets who would not normally interact come together at the Stand Down and converse as equals..." he says "and that's pretty neat". One example of that is a former neighbor of Rob's, who is wealthy and also a vet participates. He interacts with the homeless veterans at the Stand Down who come there for services. When I ask him if all of the previously offered services will be there again he says definitely. Everything from free clothing to hair cuts, new permanent California I.D.s from the DMV, and of course hot showers and lots of good food. But this year there will be an additional service not previously available. A job fair will be added this year, giving unemployed veterans the chance to meet and talk face-to-face with potential employers.

When asked how people respond to what he is trying to do, he says the response from the community is overwhelmingly supportive. He is very pleased to see the support cuts across economic, political and racial lines. "Of course we are occasionally met with misunderstanding" he says, "some people don't understand why we focus on just veterans when there are so many other homeless in need". Still others who are vehemently against the war have reservations about supporting those who fought in it. But having served himself, Rob understands the sacrifice those men and women have made, especially at war time. "It's important to remember that no matter what games the politicians play, the people who are over there are facing it-doing it for real" he says frankly, "and the ones in power are the ones who made the choice to send them there".

Rob remembers another time not too long ago when he was  
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*Local Vet Does Outreach For Standown: Continued from page 6*

called to action to speak out for veterans' rights. A few years back the Vietnam Veterans of California wanted to open a desperately needed transitional house for veterans in the former Fireside Inn of Eureka. But a wealthy businessman, Don Davenport used his pull to fight it, and won. "I called, I wrote letters, I protested" said Rob. "In the end, Davenport had the resources to keep them tied up in court so long that the V.V.C. just ran out of money". Attorneys and court costs are luxuries the rich can afford but nearly impossible for a non-profit to stand up to. "Not only that" says Rob sadly, "but he ended up dinging the V.V.C. for all of his lawyers fees, so they really got stung". Had things turned out differently for the V.V.C., Humboldt County might not be seeing so many homeless vets on the streets today.

Homeless vets would naturally be drawn to Humboldt County, where the year round climate is so mild. But like many of us who are repeatedly approached by the homeless, Rob feels their needs are needs are just too great for him to be able to make a difference. "When I'm approached by people on the street asking for money" he tells me, "even if they're vets, I have to tell them that I just can't help them, and it's the truth" he says, "you know, I can't help them with their alcoholism, there mental illness or drug dependency...but my contribution to the Stand Down...that's one way I really am helping them".

If you would like to follow the example of U.S. Army veteran Rob Ash, and give back to those men and women who have served, the Stand Down is coming October 2nd, 3rd and 4th. There are many opportunities to help for just one day, or all three days. They also need as many donated items as possible. You can call (707) 826-6272 or go to: <http://www.northcoaststanddown.org/>

## Afghanistan War Resister Sentenced

*By: Dahr Jamail, t r u t h o u t*

Sergeant Travis Bishop, with the US Army's 57th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, pled not guilty at a special court martial on Thursday to two counts of missing movement, disobeying a lawful order and going absent without leave (AWOL). Friday, in a trial full of theatrics from the jury, prosecution witnesses and the prosecution, he was found guilty on all counts.

Sgt. Bishop is the second soldier from Fort Hood in as many weeks to be tried by the military for his stand against an occupation he believes is "illegal." He insists that it would be unethical for him to deploy to support an occupation he opposes on both moral and legal grounds, and has filed for conscientious objector (CO) status. A CO is someone who refuses to participate in combat based on religious or ethical grounds, and can be given an honorable discharge by the military.

Last week, Specialist Victor Agosto was sentenced to 30 days in a county jail for his refusal to deploy to Afghanistan. Agosto, like Bishop, feels the war is illegal, something that James Branum, the civilian lawyer for both soldiers, agrees with.

"The war in Afghanistan does not meet the criteria for lawful war under the UN Charter, which says that member nations who joined the UN, as did the US, should give up war forever, aside from two exceptions: that the war is in self defense, and that the use of force was authorized by the UN Security Council," Branum told Truthout in an earlier interview, "The nation of Afghanistan did not attack the United States. The Taliban may have, but the nation and people of Afghanistan did not. And under US law, the Supremacy Clause of the US Constitution, any treaty enacted by the US is now the 'supreme law of the land.' So when the United States signed the UN Charter, we made that our law as well."

Bishop, unlike Agosto, applied for CO status due to his religious and moral convictions. Bishop told Truthout he was "opposed to all war," based on his religious beliefs, that "as a real Christian, I must be opposed to all violence, no matter what, because that is what Jesus taught."

After receiving his orders to deploy to Afghanistan, Bishop needed time to prepare his application for CO status, so he went AWOL for a week "because I didn't have time to prepare to file for CO status. So, while AWOL, I prepared a statement and filled out my application for CO [status]. Then I went back [to Fort Hood] with Branum and turned myself in. I never planned on staying AWOL. They gave me a barracks room and assigned me to a platoon and told me to show up to work the next day. That was it. They started the CO process, but they also started the Uniform Code of Military Justice process, and that's where it gets shifty."

On Thursday, Bishop's defense called two witnesses to the stand, Pfc. Anthony Sadoski and Specialist Michael Kern, both of whom are active duty soldiers at Fort Hood who said that they, too, had never been informed that filing for CO status was an option.

Captain Matt Kuskie, the prosecuting attorney, argued, "Ignorance of the law is no excuse." The judge, Major Matthew McDonald, said that whether Bishop was notified or not about his right to file for CO status was not relevant to the case.

"If every soldier in the Army who disobeyed an order could claim it was because they weren't notified of conscientious objector status, we probably wouldn't have a military any more," he added.

Branum told Truthout he is attempting to establish a precedent with the trial, regardless of the outcome. "We want to change the law, and I would argue that when soldiers are informed of their deployment, which is generally two to six months in advance, they should be giving training about CO status. I will argue that if you don't do the training, you can't deploy."

Despite Sgt. Bishop's commander, Captain Christopher Hall's admission to the court that he had never provided CO training to Bishop's unit, the jury, who were all officers of much higher ranks (six to seven ranks higher) than Bishop, therefore, not necessarily a jury of his peers, appeared hostile to Bishop's plight.

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# LET US HEAR FROM YOU!

If you would like to submit an article, opinion, comment or response to anything you have read which might interest the members of VFP-56, please e-mail it to [turtldncer@aol.com](mailto: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.

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*Afghan Resister Sentenced: Continued from page 6*

During mitigation of Sgt. Bishop's sentence, Lt. Col. Ron Leininger, a chaplain at Fort Hood who recommended that Bishop be denied his CO status, was called as a witness in an unexpected move by the prosecution, in order to counter several witnesses by the defense who each testified to Bishop's character and sincerity in his pursuit of CO status.

Leininger stated that he did not feel Bishop had a deep enough or sincerely held religious belief to establish grounds for recommending him CO status. Leininger's written report of his interview with Bishop had several mistakes, including having called Sgt. Bishop "Sgt. Bush" in one section.

Leininger claimed that his interview with Bishop lasted 45 minutes, and that he did not receive phone calls while it was occurring. Sgt. Bishop appeared shocked by this, and later, when Truthout asked him about his reaction he said, "The Chaplain only spoke with me for 20 minutes, took two calls on his cell phone, and was texting the whole time."

One of Leininger's critiques of Bishop was that he was not a member of a local church, despite the fact that for a soldier to apply for CO status, they do not have to be affiliated with a local church. Atheists, for example, can apply for CO status and be granted the status, if they can prove deeply held moral convictions that oppose violence.

When asked by the defense what he thought of religions or causes

like the civil rights movement that required people to follow their conscience - even if it meant they would have to break the law - Chaplain Leininger said, "perhaps, but that it would be sad for them to do so. Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity, was executed for breaking Roman law in order to follow his conscience."

The jury had already found Sgt. Bishop guilty of all charges, and sentenced him to one year in prison, a rank reduction to Private, forfeiture of two-thirds of his pay for one year and a bad conduct discharge.

A disappointed Branum told Truthout that he plans to take the result of the trial to the Military Court, the US Army Court of Criminal Appeals, the US Military Court of Criminal Appeals and "then Habeas Review and take it to a civilian court, then, if necessary, the Supreme Court."

Branum added, "If Travis goes to jail, he wants it to be for something. He wants it to count." The attorney said he will continue to demand the Army provide CO training, "and my hope is that when troops are going to be deployed, they'll be read their Bishop rights."

After receiving his sentence, Sgt. Bishop met with a group of friends and supporters outside the courtroom and said, "It means a lot to me you are here in my support. This is not the end, by any means. This is the beginning. When I get out, I'm going to be louder, more active, and pissed off."

*Submitted by Jim Sorter*