

## Ted Voneida

Korean War Veteran

Veterans Day Presentation

November 11, 2007

We are gathered here today to honor the veterans of all wars - women and men who have given and are giving huge chunks of their lives; all too often life itself; veterans who return home with horribly broken bodies and minds, who return home to greet children they have never gotten to know and in some cases never met, to jobs that no longer exist, to educational opportunities that have turned into unfulfilled promises, and to totally inadequate health care. Yes, we are here to honor veterans, but let's honor them in ways they deserve to be honored - by providing decent, readily available medical care instead of the shabby and shameful care offered by underfunded and understaffed VA hospitals, many of which are hundreds of miles distant from their homes. By providing the educational opportunities promised by recruiters, but which are all too often impossible to obtain as a result of technicalities noted in the fine print of their contracts. By providing the jobs which are supposed to have been held open during their absence, but which they find have been filled by others, and employers reluctant to hire them for fear that they will soon be recalled for yet another tour in Iraq or wherever we happen to be fighting at the moment. We don't have a *bona fide* draft in this war; we have, rather, a back door draft, in which Reservists and National Guardsmen and women, who signed up to earn a few bucks on weekends, have been forced to return time and again to Iraq, and who aren't even eligible for the benefits received by most of us veterans who were drafted into previous wars. At least in those wars, if you weren't killed, you were eligible for a few benefits when you returned. So yes, by all means, let's support the troops and honor the veterans - but let's do it in meaningful ways. Support them by bringing them home, and when they arrive home, instead of simply waving flags and shouting patriotic slogans, give them the care and opportunities they deserve.

One final word about fighting, because that is what those in the military do - they fight when they are ordered to fight by those who are supposedly responsible for the security of the country. I have thought about this a great deal, and I must admit that as much as I admire pacifists, I am not a pacifist. If I or any of my loved ones were attacked, I know I would fight back - I would do whatever I could to defend those I love from harm. Arguably, World War II might be looked upon as a war we fought because we *were* attacked - from the East by Japan and the West by Germany. The wars we have fought since that time: Korea, Vietnam, Panama Grenada and other Central American incursions - and now Iraq, were all based on lies, from Tonkin Bay to Weapons of Mass Destruction. Wars generated by greedy, ambitious and fundamentally insecure men who, in my opinion, were and are responsible for the unnecessary deaths of hundreds of millions of people, Americans and others, as well as the creation of wastelands in what once were, before our Napalm, Agent Orange and bunker-buster bombs, active and viable civilizations. Korea, Vietnam and the others are now, thank God, behind us, but hopefully not forgotten. The Iraq war is very much with us, and Iran looms very possibly in the near future. It has already cost nearly 4000 American lives and many thousands more who have been horribly maimed, hundreds of thousands of Iraqi lives and millions of

refugees, trillions of borrowed dollars (mostly from China by the way); at last count five hundred thousand dollars *per minute*; money which might better have been spent on improved health care, education, and a rapidly deteriorating infrastructure in this country. Iraq is a war which has generated anger and hatred toward us among those who were previously our friends. It is a war which has resulted in the trashing of our Constitution and represents a genuine threat to the Republic. Now there is talk of impeachment, which I strongly support. But impeachment is too good for the likes of Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rove, and Wolfowitz, the empire builders who got us into this mess. They should all be tried in the International Court of Criminal Justice for the war crimes they are committing and have committed.

So, in the final analysis, we must *all* become veterans - not war veterans, but rather, anti-war/pro-peace veterans. By so doing, perhaps we can, as we did in Vietnam, help to bring this horrible war in Iraq to an end, to bring our troops home, and to ensure that we aren't duped into fighting future wars. We simply must listen to the late Molly Ivans - get out in the streets and let them know we're there; let them know we care. You can start by joining the Portage Democratic Coalition's Stand for Peace demonstrations on November 16th - next Friday. We will be on the Crain avenue bridge in Kent from 7:00 to 8:30 a.m., at the Kent Gazebo, corner of Main and Franklin from 11:30-1 p.m., and at the corner of Main and Lincoln, across from Starbucks in Kent from 3-6 p.m. Let's hear it for Peace!

Thank you.