

# Veteran to Veteran, Inc.

P.O. Box 179200, San Diego, Calif. 92117 (619) 565-6661  
William P. Mahedy, Executive Vice President

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Walter H. Capps  
Department of Religious Studies  
University of California, Santa Barbara  
Santa Barbara, California

Dear Walter:

This is just a short note to remind you of our conversation of last week and our offer to include you as a member of the board of directors of Veteran to Veteran, Inc. Shad is enthusiastic and so am I.

We believe that an academic component, a "think tank" operation, if you will, is important. We propose to do more than just provide services to veterans and other victims of war. We want to study and to chronicle what it is we are doing. Because the world has clearly entered a new era with the changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union during the past few months, it is even more important that we begin now without any further delays.


The case statement explains in detail our goals in Veteran to Veteran, Inc. We expect to propose some specific projects within the next few weeks.

Because of our connections with the Soviet veterans, we propose to begin our work in the U.S.S.R.. We will attempt to provide the first services to Soviet veterans during 1991.

We have also received some inquiries recently from British veterans and we hope to be able to begin providing services to them as soon as possible.

Thanks for your interest and cooperation.

Sincerely,



William P. Mahedy  
Executive Vice President

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## CASE STATEMENT

### THE PROBLEM

The principal evil of war is the death and destruction it causes, but war leaves in its wake a host of other afflictions as well. Not least of these is its psychic residue: lingering terror, vivid memories of unspeakable horror, moral questions unresolved, the enduring pain of loss.

For its survivors, the mental, emotional and spiritual suffering of war continues long after combat has ceased. Among the survivors of any war are the former soldiers, the veterans, who are not merely the victims of war, but its perpetrators as well. For them the memories are often of pain inflicted upon others, of killing enemy soldiers--but often innocent civilians as well.

For veterans the psychic residue of war takes on a quality which differs from that of other survivors.

### THE SERVICE PROVIDED

Veteran to Veteran, Inc. (Vet to Vet) provides a unique service to veterans throughout the world--those who have fought for any nation, and on either side of any war. Vet to Vet will provide assistance to veterans in healing the psychic residue of war.

One component of war related psychological trauma is known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Other problem areas include the reintegration of veterans into their own families, social readjustment into their societies and the resolution of moral and religious questions. Veteran to Veteran, Inc. will assemble and send teams anywhere in the world to provide this assistance and will bring representative groups of veterans from other nations to the United States to meet with veterans here.

Because PTSD cannot be treated in isolation from the social environment in which the veterans live, Vet to Vet will provide assistance to veterans' families and when necessary will act as intermediary between local veteran groups and outside organizations willing to provide such items as medical supplies and such services as job training, economic assistance and joint trade ventures.

## THE PARTICIPANTS: THEIR EXPERTISE

Participants in Vet to Vet, have years of experience in treating post-traumatic stress disorder among American veterans, especially those who served in Vietnam. Two of the participants are co-authors of the design for America's nationwide Vet Center program.

Other nationally recognized experts in the treatment of PTSD have indicated a willingness to provide their services on an international basis. Many other Vietnam vets who have themselves successfully completed therapy for PTSD and who have successfully readjusted to society are willing to share their recovery with veterans from other nations by participating in the Veteran to Veteran program.

The accumulated American expertise has been acquired during more than fifteen years of clinical practice, countless informal "rap group" sessions and very effective "veteran to veteran" peer counseling. The research resulting from this work with veterans has been widely disseminated and is internationally respected.

Participants in Vet to Vet will be, for the most part, Vietnam Veterans, though others with specific expertise will be invited to take part.

## HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE PROJECT

1. Vietnam: Vietnam veterans have been active in a variety of ways to bring about a wider healing of the wounds of war among people of other nations, beginning with their former enemy. A number of vets have returned to Vietnam in an attempt to recover some inner peace themselves and to "normalize" relationships with the Vietnamese people. Other vets have volunteered to return to Vietnam to build hospitals and to assist in clearing the land of mines and other explosives remaining from the war.

2. The Soviet Union: Vietnam veterans have already made available to Soviet veterans of the Afghan war some of the psychological services necessary for the treatment of combat related post traumatic stress. A group of Vietnam veteran psychologists and other rehabilitation specialists visited the Soviet Union at the request of a private Soviet Foundation, the Foudation for Social Inventions. The visit took place in the fall of 1988. The American delegation was organized by Diana Glasgow of Earthstewards Network, a Seattle based group.

Within a two week period the American veterans visited Moscow and Leningrad. They established close contact with about 75 Soviet veterans, ran "rap groups," conducted individual counseling sessions, met with military and civilian psychiatrists and made

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recommendations regarding future treatment. Other delegations of Vietnam veterans visited the Soviet Union during 1988 and 1989, having similar experiences in other Soviet cities. Veteran to Veteran, Inc. members have been participants in these subsequent visits.

All the American delegations were able to build close personal bonds with Soviet veterans--and this with the full knowledge that we had really been enemies, fighting against each other's nations through third world surrogates. Vietnam veterans hosted Soviet veterans in a reciprocal visit during the spring of 1989 with similar results.

Vet to Vet board member, Diana Glasgow was invited to return to the USSR to work with Afghan veterans in 12 cities. She arrived in Moscow in October 1989 with the intention of remaining for four months. Vet to Vet President Shad Meshad was invited to return in November 1989.

Soviet veterans were found to have symptoms of PTSD identical to those found among Vietnam veterans, problems in social readjustment which were similar though not identical to those of Americans, and religious and moral conflicts which bore some resemblance to those found among Americans.

3. Central America: Vietnam veterans have also visited Central America in an effort to find solutions to the wars there.

4. Australia: Australian troops served as American allies in Vietnam. After the war their veterans began to suffer the same symptoms of post traumatic stress as did Americans and they began to experience similar problems readjusting to society. The Australian government initiated its own vet center program after consultation with American experts and after Australians visited the American centers. The Australian program is based upon the American model and has proven quite effective.

5. Great Britain and Israel: Requests for assistance in dealing with post traumatic stress have been received recently from Israeli and British veterans.

6. Afghanistan: During a recent broadcast, an interviewer for the RADIO VOICE OF AFGHANISTAN questioned the propriety of American veterans assisting the Soviet invaders of his country. He was assured that such expertise would be available to people in his own country whenever the request for it was received. Further conversations have indicated that whenever the war in Afghanistan is ended and a new regime established, this request will be forthcoming.

## CONCLUSIONS

From this history the following conclusions seem warranted.

1. It is clear that Vietnam veterans have demonstrated an interest in healing the wounds of war throughout the world in sufficient numbers to assure a large enough pool of veterans to respond to any request.
2. The American-Soviet venture, which was specifically focused on dealing with post-traumatic stress, demonstrates that cross-cultural counseling, "rap groups" and discussions conducted through interpreters can be very successful.
3. It is possible for former enemies to work together in an effort to heal the wounds of war. The return of Americans to Vietnam indicates this as does the Soviet experience.
4. War causes the same kind of psychic residue and social disruption in very different cultures.
5. By virtue of experience and research, Vietnam veterans and the specialists who have worked with them over the years have much to offer veterans in other parts of the world.
6. Events which have taken place during the latter part of 1989, highlighted by the opening of the Berlin Wall, demonstrate that the climate in the world is increasingly favorable to ventures such as that proposed by Vet to Vet.

## HOW THE PROJECT WORKS

1. Assessment: Upon receipt of a request for assistance, Vet to Vet representatives visit the country to assess its needs. Requests for medical assistance, prosthetics or other supplies are referred to appropriate channels. Representatives meet with military leaders, medical and psychiatric specialists, ordinary veterans and other people in the communities.

Particular attention must be paid to cultural differences. No attempt should be made to impose the American model upon other countries. American expertise should be made available as adapted to the local culture. The Soviet experience indicates that this can be done quite successfully.

The assessment report determines the composition and number of teams which are gathered and sent to the requesting country. The types of experts needed, the mix of ordinary veterans to

psychologists and other factors would presumably differ in each situation.

2. Implementation: Teams are sent to whatever locations have been specified by the host nation to meet with veterans and other people designated by the hosts. Because these meetings will be conducted through translators, the inviting nation must insure that these are present in sufficient numbers.

The team spends about ten days to two weeks in each place. During this time team members meet with individual veterans and with groups of veterans. The team will perform whatever tasks are required: individual counseling, rap groups, meetings with mental health professionals, informal discussions with veterans, marriage and family counseling, meetings with families of deceased or living veterans. If necessary, team members will meet with local leaders, employers or those able to assist in social readjustment of veterans. Where requested team members will meet with local religious leaders of whatever faith.

The real purpose of the team visit is to leave behind something of its own experience and expertise, allowing the local people to make the adaptations appropriate to their own culture. If necessary to complete the task, the team will recommend further visits.

3. Follow-Up: Where requested, Vet to Vet will arrange for further team visits will take place. If veteran representatives of the host country seek invitations to the United States to learn more from a study of the American models, Vet to Vet will sponsor such visits. (Soviet military psychiatrists have already requested an invitation to the U.S. for this purpose.)

Vet to Vet will lend the host country whatever assistance is needed to adapt and institutionalize its own programs of veteran readjustment.

#### THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE

The first goal of Veteran to Veteran will be to continue the contacts already established with Soviet veterans. Because of commitments already made and because of the enormous need in the Soviet Union, Veteran to Veteran's first effort must be to continue this task. The Soviets have requested American to return in April 1989 in to respond in detail to a specific agenda they have designed. A visit of Soviet veterans to the U.S. is planned for May-June 1989.

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Requests from Israelis and British have been more limited than those from the Soviet Union but Veteran to Veteran should be able to provide the assistance these veterans request. Once efforts are begun in these countries, requests for further assistance are likely.

If veteran visits to Vietnam and to Central America result in requests for psychological assistance, Veteran to Veteran must begin to draw upon existing resources and create new ones in order to meet these needs. Contacts already initiated in Central America should be continued. Veteran to Veteran should be prepared to respond when the violence ends in those areas.

Veteran to Veteran should maintain contact with the spokesman from Afghanistan, preparing to respond when the more immediate problems in that country are resolved.

In the future, contact should be established if possible in Iran, Iraq, Northern Ireland, South Africa, Argentina, Kampuchea, Libya, Beirut, Syria, and among the PLO.

A certain number of veterans and other experts who volunteer to work extensively through Veteran to Veteran should be encouraged and funded to begin appropriate language and culture studies as soon as possible.

#### THE PROJECT'S POTENTIAL

Vet to Vet has concrete, limited and specific goals as outlined in this proposal. By meeting these goals, Veteran to Veteran actually accomplishes more than it sets out to do. It begins to perform an international peacemaking function. The mental, emotional, spiritual wounds of war cannot really heal unless there is a commitment on the part of the veteran to make peace in his own heart through making peace with his enemies. We have enough experience by now to know that this is true. If veterans in nations around the world begin to understand this in sufficient numbers, then peace throughout the world becomes much more likely.

The Soviet-American experience has demonstrated beyond any doubt that veterans from hostile nations and different cultures can sit down together and mutually heal the psychic scars of war. The healing is all the more powerful because it involves making peace together. Veteran to Veteran proposes to implement this model internationally, because, in the words of Steve Mason, a Vietnam veteran poet, there is one last mission awaiting each soldier in every war:

"One last commitment worthy of a lifetime--to fight for peace in each of our hearts against the fierce enemies of our darkest natures.

And to march in lock-step with veterans of all wars from all nations for human dignity.

Then shall we pass in review and each will hear mankind whisper to the gods,

'There then, goes one of ours.'"

#### A SAMPLE VETERAN TO VETERAN PROGRAM

The following is a program written by two Veteran to Veteran participants, William P. Mahedy and Shad Meshad. It is designed to be used in the ABILITY CENTER in Moscow. This Center is a dream of Soviets and Americans who signed a joint venture agreement during the first visit of American specialists to the U.S.S.R. in 1988. It will include orthopedic medicine, prosthetics, wheelchair and computer technology for the disabled. This design for the psychological readjustment component of the center is based upon a first hand assessment of Soviet needs and is an example of what Veteran to Veteran could do:

The ABILITY CENTER in Moscow will feature a Veterans Readjustment Component. This readjustment center will offer services to Soviet veterans of the war in Afghanistan which are similar to those available to American veterans of the war in Vietnam. This service is made available to Soviets with the understanding that anything offered by Americans must necessarily be altered and adjusted to fit the needs of the Russian language, the Soviet culture and experience.

The Veterans' Readjustment Center will provide the following services:

1. The training of mental health professionals and veteran peer group counselors. Because the Afghan veterans are already well-organized into clubs, they have achieved a sense of community which is an important element in the readjustment process. Training would enable some of these veterans selected from different clubs around the Soviet Union to function as leaders of group counseling sessions. Training would also provide them with skills necessary to do individual counseling. These veterans could then return to their homes and begin to work in their own groups. Further training would be provided for them on a regular basis. Mental health professionals would also be trained in readjustment counseling, but would also share information and research data on post traumatic stress with the international community of experts. The basis of this training would be the body of information and experience acquired during the past fifteen years in the United States related to treating post-traumatic stress disorder among Vietnam veterans.



2. Readjustment Counseling. The Moscow Center would provide actual counseling services for the veterans who live in the Moscow area. Mental health professionals and veteran peer group counselors would be involved.

3. Outreach. The American experience has shown that some veterans have been so disturbed by the stress of combat that they are unable to seek help on their own. In such cases readjustment counselors assess each individual situation and provide appropriate outreach to the veteran. If the same situation exists in Soviet society, similar outreach will probably be necessary. The center would provide this service.

4. Social services. Combat related stress has made it difficult for many veterans to hold jobs or to remain in stable living conditions. Assessment of job and living situations, contact with employers, friends and neighborhood organizations and agencies often results in suggestions and recommendations which bring about changes in the veteran's social environment. Through this process the veteran is once again able to become a healthy and productive member of society. The center would provide this service as needed.

5. Marriage and Family Counseling. The American experience has shown that combat-related stress has often severely impaired the marriage and family relationship. If a similar situation exists among veterans of the Afghan war, the center would provide marriage and family counseling to the extent it is needed.

6. Job training. Some veterans spend much of their psychological energy dealing with post-traumatic stress problems. For this reason they have diminished skills in the workplace. Job training can often overcome this deficiency. The center could work with employers in providing such training.

7. Alcohol and drug related programs. The American experience has shown that a large number of veterans have problems related to drug and alcohol abuse. To the extent this is true among Soviet veterans, the center would provide drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs. These programs would be appropriately integrated with other programs existing in the Moscow area.