



VETERANS FOR PEACE  
HUMBOLDT BAY  
CHAPTER 56

# THE FOGHORN

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*“Cutting Through the Fog of War”*

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## Gas Buddy

New Agent Orange Rule to Allow Retro Claims by 86,000

Published: April 6, 2010

*By Tom Philpott*

About 86,000 Vietnam War veterans, their surviving spouses or estates will be eligible for retroactive disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs -- an average of 11.4 years for veterans and 9.6 years for survivors -- under a draft VA rule to expand by three the number of diseases presumed caused by herbicide exposure in the war.

The 86,000 are beneficiaries who can reopen previously denied claims for these conditions: ischemic heart disease, Parkinson's disease and chronic B-cell blood cancers including hairy cell leukemia. But another 29,000 claims are expected to be approved this year for Vietnam veterans suffering from these diseases but applying for benefits for the first time.

The projected cost of this dramatic expansion of claims linked to Agent Orange and other defoliants deployed four decades ago is \$13.6 billion this fiscal year and \$42.2 billion over 10 years. VA plans to hire 1772 new claims processors, starting this October, to be able to handle these claims “without significantly degrading the processing of the non-presumptive workload.”

In the proposed rule published March 25 in the Federal Register, VA officials explained that Secretary Eric Shinseki has cut the usual 60-day public comment period by half “to promote rapid action” on these claims.

When a final rule is published, soon after April 26, VA claim offices across the country can begin making payments. Veterans with these diseases will need to show they set foot in Vietnam during the war. Those who served aboard ship just off the coast remain ineligible.

John Maki, assistant national service director for Disabled American Veterans, said DAV was glad to see the comment period cut to 30 days. Otherwise, the draft regulation contains no surprises. “It basically is going to take those three conditions and just add them to disabilities already listed as presumptive diseases for Agent Orange,” Maki said.

One surprise still might be the thoroughness of the draft rule's analysis of the beneficiary populations and the costs facing the department from this wave of claims for both retroactive payments and new benefits.

Adding ischemic heart disease to the list of presumptive Agent Orange illnesses is by far the most significant part of the new rule, accounting for 82 percent of additional expected payments to beneficiaries.

The rule defines ischemic health disease as a condition causing inadequate supply of blood and oxygen to the myocardium, the middle and thickest layer of the heart wall. “IHD” can include, but is not limited to, acute, subacute and old myocardial infarction; atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease including coronary artery disease (or spasm) and coronary bypass surgery, and stable, unstable and Prinzmetal's angina.

Because IHD is a heart disease it “does not include hypertension or peripheral manifestations of arteriosclerosis such as peripheral vascular disease or stroke,” the draft regulation explains.

Of 86,000 beneficiaries eligible for retroactive claims, VA estimates that nearly 70,000 of them are living Vietnam veterans, their average age now 63. Of those, 62,200 previously were denied compensation for IHD, 5400 were denied for B-cell leukemia and 2300 for Parkinson's disease.

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About 53,000 who previously filed claims for these diseases already are receiving VA compensation for other service-related diseases. Of those, roughly 8350 are rated 100-percent disabled and therefore might not be eligible for retroactive pay.

VA assumes that veterans with Parkinson’s disease or for B-cell leukemia will be awarded a 100-percent disability ratings. The average rating for ischemic heart diseases is expected to be 60 percent.

In calculating VA costs from this change, VA assumes that 80 percent of the eligible population will apply for benefits and 100 percent of those who do will be approved. But eligible vets and survivors must file claims to get paid; nothing will happen automatically. To file claims on line visit: <http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp> . Veterans without a computer can call a toll-free helpline at 1-800-749-8387.

VA maintains a directory of veterans’ service organizations with trained staff to help in filing claims. The website: <http://www1.va.gov/vso/>. Many state, county and local governments also have personnel to help. Find information on these agencies at: <http://www.va.gov/statedva.htm>.

VA also expects many ineligible veterans to file claims. They will be found ineligible because they can’t show they ever set foot in Vietnam though they suffer from one of the qualifying diseases. Many claims will be filed by veterans with hypertension but those will be rejected because that condition is not a “heart disease” under the VA draft regulation.

In total, VA expects claims volume from presumptive Agent Orange diseases to hit 159,000 this year and to exceed 270,000 by fiscal 2019.

Maki noted that entitlement to benefits only occurs with final publication of the regulation. Retroactive payments usually will be made back to the date a claim was filed for a presumptive disease.

“It is possible, since this is a liberalized law, that somebody may be able to get the retroactive date [moved back] to one year prior to the effective date in the regulation, if they can show they had the claimed condition prior to that year,” Maki said.

The growing list of Agent Orange diseases stems of a court case, *Nehmer v. Department of Veterans Affairs*, filed in 1986 The class action lawsuit won by veterans, and reinforced by legislation, requires VA to direct the National Academy of Sciences to report every two years on any positive association between new diseases and exposure to herbicides in Vietnam

In 2007, the Bush administration went to court to challenge the legal need for NAS studies on presumptive AO diseases to continue. It lost. The NAS reports are to continue through Oct. 1, 2014, with the possibility that more diseases will be found to have an association with herbicide exposure.

- *Tom Philpott, a syndicated columnist and freelance writer, has covered the military for more than 25 years as senior editor of Navy Times. To comment, e-mail milupdate@aol.com, write to Military Update, P.O. Box 231111, Centreville, VA, 20120-1111*



**EDILITH ECKART  
MEMORIAL PEACE  
SCHOLARSHIP TO  
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Pictured are Carol Woods 13(left) of the Humboldt Branch of Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and Hayley Umayam of the Arabic Peace and Culture Club (APACC) of HSU. Humboldt WILPF recently awarded the Edilith Eckart Memorial Peace Scholarship to APACC to help support their “Peace in the Middle East Festival” held on March 28 at HSU. The festival, organized in conjunction with the HSU branch of the Jewish Student Union, featured educational workshops and cultural events with the goal of promoting a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.



**EDILITH ECKART  
BELOVED WORLD PEACE  
ADVOCATE**

Those interested in donating to the Edilith Eckart Peace Scholarship can contact Humboldt WILPF at [wilpf@humboldt1.com](mailto:wilpf@humboldt1.com)

## MEETING THE ENEMY A MARINE GOES HOME

By Suel D. Jones

Book Reviewed by Woody Powell

Suel Jones has written a remarkable piece of personal history that should resonate with and provide a guiding beacon toward sanity for many veterans of his war in Vietnam.

I was afraid it would be so highly personal as to be almost useless to anyone but those who know Suel. I had no reason to fear. Somehow he has managed to make his life the life of “everyman”, in that his narrative draws on the narratives of others in his unit to flesh out his own experiences, while at the same time maintaining his own voice as a questioning observer.

Suel’s acquaintance with journalism and story-telling serves him well as he draws us deep into the jungles of Vietnam, then back to his family in East Texas, then again to the jungles. As the story unfolds, so does the making of this man, from Baptist believer in a military haircut to hirsute icon breaker hobnobbing with hippies who don’t know who he really is.

And there it is. Who is Duane? Who is Duane, now Suel? What can he make of the hypocrisy and murder he participated in, even when he was no longer an “innocent”? How can he fit himself to that person, the person he became on the battlefield and the one he is now becoming off the battlefield, in the arms of a family who don’t get it.

Don’t get what? Whatever it is that separates us when we come back to a world that doesn’t know a thing about what we saw and did and tries to paint a nice face on it.

The turning point came when he resolved to go back and be with the Vietnamese, the enemy, and his discovery of a way of being that revolved around forgiveness -- a forgiveness so off-handed that it is absolutely confounding to the “me first, get what you can”, individualized culture we come from.

From a lone cabin in the Alaskan woods, isolated and separate from any human beings, Suel traveled to a country where rubbing against people constantly is a source of security and, yes, happiness. That he could appreciate and adjust, even to some extent, is testimony to the openness of this man’s mind to a foreign way of being -- and his hunger to find his way of being after leaving so much wrecked life behind.

More than anything else, the experience of acceptance into a bustling Hanoi neighborhood, being mentored by the neighborhood leader, Mr. Tin, taught what few words he could absorb of their language, gave him relief from crippling remorse, gave him the gift of sanity. Certainly more than anything the VA could do with therapy and drugs.

His journey finally brought him to the Vietnam Friendship Village, founded by another Vietnam veteran, George Mizo, where he volunteers with children and Vietnamese veterans suffering the effects of Agent Orange.

I was struck by the intensity of feeling conveyed by Suel’s well-chosen words. There is a poet here, as well as a story teller. It is stories like his that carry us forward with our lives after war, allow us to face down the conditioning that made us monsters in our own eyes. It is stories like this that help us see clearly the pettiness of governments and leaders whose frail natures make them insist on others’ blood to feel potent and powerful.

As Mr. Tin said early in their friendship, “Remember, Mr. Suel, you must always look to the front, because the behind is gone.”

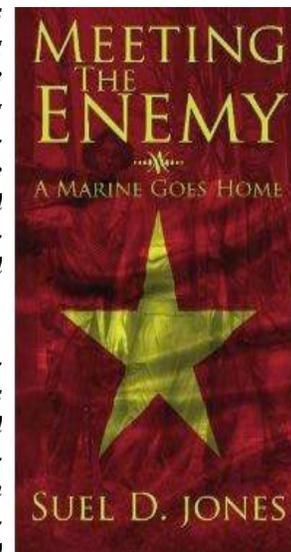
## Reconciling and Inner Healing Goes Well with Food and Wine!

By Mashaw McGinnis

*A long overdue VFP sponsored dinner with a presentation by Vietnam veteran and author Suel D. Jones happens on Saturday, May 15 at 6:00 p.m. at the Marsh Commons. The theme is “reconciliation and inner healing” as Jones, a VFP member and personal friend of Carl Stancil’s dishes up tasty tidbits of his memoir, Meeting the Enemy: A Marine Goes Home. The book describes his journey from young U.S. Marine to older, wiser veteran living and volunteering in Vietnam. The public is invited to connect with old friends and make new ones over dinner, including dessert and live musical accompaniment!*

*Following a savory dinner with options for vegans and omnivores, guests will be treated to colorful stories and slides illustrating Jones’ inner transformation. Upon his return to Vietnam in 1998, Jones was met with forgiveness by the people he once considered “the enemy,” allowing him to resolve some painful feelings. “I found a wonderful country and made many new friends,” he says, by embracing a culture of kindness. Signed copies of Jones’ book will be available at the event, sponsored by our VFP.*

*A sliding-scale donation of \$10-\$20 is suggested. Seating is limited, so RSVPs are strongly encouraged. Call Mashaw at 826-0556 for more information or to reserve a seat.*



## SUPPORT OUR TROOPS?

*By Jim Sorter*

Has anyone having viewed, read or heard about the wanton destruction troops on a Apache helicopter wreaked on innocent Iraqis and two Reuters reporters, not walked away from it without feeling a gut wrenching nausea in the pit of their stomach?

If you are not familiar with the incident, here it is in a nutshell. Wikileaks internet site uncovered a classified video of an Apache helicopter firing on a group of 12 Iraq citizens in July 2007 whom they claimed had RPGs, AR47s and other weapons in their possession. The video clearly shows no weapons in the hands of the civilians on the ground. Two of the civilians, Reuters reporters did have camera bags slung over their shoulders to carry their cameras.

An Apache helicopter circled the group several times trying to see if they were armed, and dangerous and finally talked themselves into believing that they indeed were. They sought permission from their commanders and were given permission to, "Light the bastards up," and within minutes all twelve of the men were blown away in a sickening blast of gunfire, including the two Reuters reporters. Seeing one of the Reuters reporters was only wounded, crew members from the helicopter begged him to pick up something so they could justify shooting him again. He picked up his camera bag and they immediately sent a barrage of fire into him literally blowing him to pieces. After the slaughter, men on the helicopter were laughing about the "son-of-a-bitches" they had just killed and congratulating themselves on a "job well done."

Not finished yet, when a car pulled into the scene to help some of the men on the ground the Apache helicopter opened fire on it, killing two more men and seriously wounding two young children who were riding in the car. A remark from one of the helicopter crew was a callous, "Well, they should not have brought their children to a war zone." The helicopter crew would not even allow others of our troops, who had now arrived on the ground, to take the children to a military hospital just a few kilometers away for treatment.

In this new era of drones, smart bombs and video war game killings, our military is becoming totally desensitized to the brutality and suffering they are inflicting on innocent civilians as "collateral damage." Every day we hear filtered stories about our "heroes" winning another battle of the hearts and minds of the civilians, but only to find out later that wholesale slaughter is part of the winning strategy.

Can we honestly support troops who buy into this mentality and feel good about themselves and their missions, who rape one-third of their female comrades in arms? Can we condone the behaviors of the video computer screen player who guides his drone over a city, releases havoc, kills innocent "collateral PEOPLE" and then

goes home to his family every night? Can we condone this behavior and then welcome them home with a pat on the back and say job well done? Are we creating a generation of veterans who can never escape the horrors of PTSD when they have time to contemplate on what was required of them?

I have been reading comments and taking comments from veterans who have been in similar situations. One comment read, "To be honest, having read accounts like "Generation Kill", of how the recent wars play out on the ground, (absurdly violent civilian killings were a regular occurrence and never on purpose), this leaked video didn't seem like anything extraordinary. It seems this video shows more of the truth of what is going on than an anomaly. Our young men and women are being trained and desensitized to kill without remorse. The old "Kill or be Killed" adage."

No doubt we have not generally heard of these incidents because they have been covered up by the Pentagon as a justifiable engagements of war. In other words, the truth must be oppressed by the government and military. They commit the war crimes, but do not prosecute the war criminals, and instead suppress the truth-tellers who dare to report and prove that crimes exist.

Our military leaders are taking our children and turning them into hired thugs, brain-washing them, desensitizing them with mind control and unleashing them, without conscience into situations where innocent men, women, and children are slaughtered on a daily basis. And once discharged from military service they are to forget the atrocities that will haunt them with PTSD and be expected to be the compassionate, caring, functional men and women they were prior to enlisting.

The citizens of our Nation have a right to know what is being done in their name! What kind of country do we live in when reporters are murdered indiscriminately, crimes committed, and the information about the crimes are repressed supposedly due to national security concerns? Is such a nation honorable or worthy to be called "democracy?" Or is it just another one of the world's tyrannical regimes.

I cannot feel supportive of a country or the troops who have bought into this senseless mayhem, whereby they see these acts of violence as humorous and heroic, where they feel justified in molesting and raping their fellow female comrades in arms without remorse.

We need to bring our troops home now. Give them back their honor, pride and dignity. Help them with counseling, group therapy, talking with VFP hotlines to help with PTSD issues. So long as these men and women endure the craziness of war and killing, it will further destroy their humanity and we will wind up with a generation of psychopaths suffering with PTSD who potentially will be our next homeless vets walking our streets and filling our prisons.



## THOUGHTS ON THE YARD SALE

*By Steve Sottong*

Our last yard sale was a success, but there were a few problems that could be alleviated by better vetting of the items we accept.

First: no televisions. Each and every television we accept carries a \$25.00 liability if we have to recycle it. The televisions we got for the last yard sale did not sell, in fact, we couldn't give them away. The same is true for old style computer monitors. Even newer computer monitors don't sell well especially if they are small.

And speaking of computer, don't take them either. Once again, they carry a substantial recycling fee and don't sell. Working laptops might sell, but not older desktop computers.

Books did not sell and we should probably not accept them. The exception was children's books. Part of the problem is that they simply take up too much space to display them properly, but most of our customers weren't in the market for someone's discarded romance novels. Ditto vinyl records.

A few simple rules will also help minimize the amount of unsold goods. If it's broke, it's junk, not merchandise. Don't accept it. Badly stained, cat clawed and otherwise damaged furniture doesn't sell either. Similarly, clothes need to be clean and in good repair.

Lastly, some items are just too esoteric to sell easily. Among the items we had left over last year were 25 pounds of modeling clay and a set of snow chains for a huge truck. Given just the right person, they might have sold, but the possibility of that person dropping by our yard sale was very slim. Consider the likelihood of a sale before you accept or donate items for the yard sale.

## Is the U.S. Army Losing Its War on Suicide?

*By Mark Thompson / Washington*

From the invasion of Afghanistan until last summer, the U.S. military had lost 761 soldiers in combat there. But a higher number in the service — 817 — had taken their own lives over the same period. The surge in suicides, which have risen five years in a row, has become a vexing problem for which the Army's highest levels of command have yet to find a solution despite deploying hundreds of mental-health experts and investing millions of dollars. And the elephant in the room in much of the formal discussion of the problem is the burden of repeated tours of combat duty on a soldier's battered psyche.

The problem is exacerbated by the manpower challenges faced by the service, because new research suggests that repeated combat deployments seem to be driving the suicide surge. The only way to apply the brakes will be to reduce the number of deployments per

soldier and extend what the Army calls "dwell time" — the duration spent at home between trips to war zones. But the only way to make that possible would be to expand the Army's troop strength, or reduce the number of soldiers sent off to war.

"It's frankly frustrating that with the level of effort that we've put out there, that we haven't stemmed the [suicide] tide," General George Casey, the Army's top officer, told a House panel March 23. When pressed by a lawmaker the previous month on whether the Army was getting closer to solving the challenge, Army Secretary John McHugh was blunt. "Sadly, the answer is not much closer," he told the Senate Armed Services Committee Feb. 23. "As to why people take this step — particularly as to why men and women in uniform do — we're still in many ways befuddled."

Befuddled and frustrating are not words routinely deployed by Army leaders. But the service's suicide rate continues to rise (it doubled between 2001 and 2006) while remaining flat in the civilian population, even when adjusted to reflect the Army's age and gender. Last year, 160 active-duty soldiers killed themselves, up from 140 in 2008 and 77 in 2003. In order to get a better grip on the causes of the problem, the service has issued new orders telling its commanders how to conduct future suicide investigations so that they are consistent across the board, spokesman Gary Tallman says. The directive's stated goal is to pinpoint "the circumstances, methods and contributing factors surrounding the event" in hopes of generating "clear, relevant and practical recommendation(s) to prevent future suicides." The Army wants to know all about the dead soldier's personal relationships, final conversation, financial status, recent moods and other personality traits.

When accounting publicly for the trend, Army commanders tend to avoid acknowledging that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq may be a cause. "A third of the confirmed suicides are committed by troops that had never deployed," McHugh recently told a House panel. But the other two-thirds killed themselves either in a war zone or after returning from one. "The suicide rate among soldiers who have deployed to [war zones] is higher than for soldiers who have never deployed," Colonel Elspeth Ritchie, a top Army psychiatrist, told a suicide-prevention conference in January.

Army leaders say that broken personal relationships seem to be the most common thread linking suicides. "The one transcendent factor that we seem to have, if there's any one that's associated with [suicide], is fractured relationships of some sort," Lieut. General Eric Schoemaker, the Army surgeon general, told a Senate panel last month. What they fail to note, however, is the corrosive effect repeated deployments can have on such relationships. Ritchie pointed out in January that there are "higher rates of mental-health problems and marital problems for multiple deployers."

In recent years, soldiers had been allowed only a year of dwell time before heading back to war. Even though dwell time is now getting closer to two years, research suggests it takes up to three years for the stress of a one-year combat deployment to abate.

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The experience of combat itself may also play a role. "Combat increases fearlessness about death and the capability for suicide," said Craig Bryan, a University of Texas psychologist, briefing Pentagon officials in January. The combination of combat exposure and ready access to guns can be lethal to anyone contemplating suicide. About half of soldiers who kill themselves use weapons, and the figure rises to 93% among those deployed in war zones.

Bryan, a suicide expert who recently left the Air Force, says the military finds itself in a catch-22. "We train our warriors to use controlled violence and aggression, to suppress strong emotional reactions in the face of adversity, to tolerate physical and emotional pain and to overcome the fear of injury and death," he told TIME. While required for combat, "these qualities are also associated with increased risk for suicide." Such conditioning cannot be dulled "without negatively affecting the fighting capability of our military," he adds. "Service members are, simply put, more capable of killing themselves by sheer consequence of their professional training."

Bryan's research suggests that the Army's most effective suicide-prevention strategy would be to make its troops suicide-resistant rather than trying to intervene once soldiers have decided to kill themselves. The Army seems to be listening. Its goal is more aimed at "holistically improving the physical, mental and spiritual health of our soldiers and their families than solely focusing on suicide prevention," says General Peter Chiarelli, the service's No. 2 officer and its key suicide fighter. "If we do the first, we are convinced that the second will happen." His boss concurs. For too long, General Casey told a Senate panel March 3, "we were shooting behind the target," trying to prevent suicide when it was already too late.

Next VFP56 meeting will  
be held on Thursday,  
May 6th at 7:00 PM.  
Meeting will be held in the  
Commons Room at 550  
Union Street in Arcata.

## VA Underpaying on GI Bill Living Stipends

By Rick Maze - Staff writer

In a sign of continuing problems with the Post-9/11 GI Bill, Veterans Affairs Department officials acknowledged Monday that living stipends being paid to students for the spring term are outdated because of problems with computing the payments.

On average, this means students are receiving about \$63 less a month than they should. In some cases, especially in high-cost areas, the losses could be significantly higher.

The problem came to light just days before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee will hold a hearing about implementation problems for the new and problem-plagued education program, which launched Aug. 1.

Monthly living stipends, a key feature of the new benefit, are based on Basic Allowance for Housing rates paid by the Defense Department, which change each Jan. 1.

This year, the locality-based housing allowances increased by an average of 2.5 percent, with some rates jumping as much as 13.6 percent. For active-duty service members, the new rates were included in January paychecks.

But VA spokesman Steve Westerfeld said the new rates will not be reflected in Post-9/11 GI Bill living stipends until July because of technological limitations.

VA hopes by July to implement the second phase of a new software system to automatically calculate and pay GI Bill benefits. Full implementation is expected in December.

VA has been telling students who ask that retroactive payments of the difference between the 2010 and 2009 living stipend rates will be made once the software updates are made.

Westerfeld said plans for the retroactive payments have not been publicly announced.

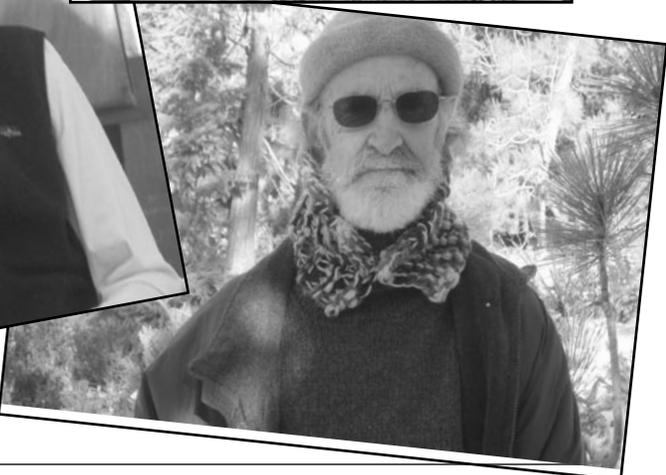
How many students will be owed money is unclear. VA officials report that about 240,000 students are using GI Bill benefits for the spring term, but many are not eligible for the living stipend.

Active-duty service members and their spouses, students enrolled only in distance learning classes and students who attend school only half time or less are not eligible for any living stipend.

VA found itself unable to pay living stipends at all during much of the fall semester because of problems with eligibility and certification. VA officials ended up providing \$3,000 advance payments to veterans to help with expenses while problems were worked out. The department is now in recouping the \$3,000 advances from veterans.



*A small but intimate group met over at Bill & June Thompson's home on Saturday 24th for a VFP56 retreat. Although the group was small the camaraderie and conversation were great. We played drums, ate and shared stories of our lives and what led us to VFP56. Pictured below are the members who attended.*





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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 [turtldnccer@aol.com](mailto:turtldnccer@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.

## **Jim Page & Joanne Rand/Visit Arcata**

**VFP 56 invites you to attend an evening with JIM PAGE and JOANNE RAND Saturday, May 22nd, 8pm Humbrews 856 10th Street \* Arcata.**

**Jim Page is a friend of VFP \* Please support him by attending. His lyrics speak clearly and directly about human and political dynamics, delivered with an ever-flowing strum.**

**Joanne Rand writes "songs that span the human condition." Rand's music is radical, classical, earth-based, politico-spiritual, folk-rock "song poetry" of the ages.**

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