

November 16, 2000

Roger C. Adams, Esq.
United States Department of Justice
Office of the Pardon Attorney
500 First Street NW
Suite 400
Washington DC 20530

Dear Mr. Adams,

I am writing to express my support for clemency for Howard Mechanic, who is now serving a five year sentence in Federal prison for a crime committed during a 1970 student demonstration at Washington University in St. Louis. I understand that Mr. Mechanic has submitted an application for a commutation of his sentence. I fully support his efforts and ask for your consideration of his petition.

Mr. Mechanic was convicted of a violation of the Civil Obedience Act of 1968 for throwing a cherry bomb toward firemen trying to put out a blaze at the ROTC building during a student demonstration. The cherry bomb hit no one and caused no damage. Mr. Mechanic was convicted on the basis of testimony of a police informant who has since died. A co-defendant, Larry Kogan, who was sentenced to only three months for the same offense, has subsequently admitted that he was the one who threw the cherry bomb.

Even though his co-defendant was only sentenced to three months, Mr. Mechanic received the maximum penalty of five years imprisonment. Rather than serve his sentence, he fled the area and started a new life under a different identify. Since that time he has lived an exemplary life, volunteering for numerous charities and donating money for clean air, water, and social justice. His true identity was discovered earlier this year, and since that time he has been incarcerated in the federal prison at Florence, Arizona, serving out the original sentence of five years.

I believe I am qualified to speak out in favor of Mr. Mechanic's application for clemency. I was a combat infantry officer in the U.S. Marines and served during the Vietnam War. In April 1969, I was leading an assault when a North Vietnamese bullet severed my spinal cord, leaving me paralyzed from the chest down.


In 1978 I founded Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), the only congressionally chartered veterans membership organization in the country. Under my leadership, VVA led the fight for many changes in the treatment of veterans, including court review of VA claims, service connected disability benefits for Agent Orange related diseases, and the Vet Center program.

In 1980 I founded Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, whose mission included to try and effect a true ending of the Vietnam War through reconciliation with our former enemies in Indochina. I was one of the first veterans to return to Vietnam after the war, and VVAF has been a leader in the fostering of good relations between Vietnam and the United States. Currently VVAF operates two clinics in Vietnam for disabled persons, including a children's orthotics program in Hanoi, as well as clinics in Cambodia and other war-torn countries around the world.

As you well know, the sixties and the seventies were a time of tremendous turmoil and unrest in our country. There were incredible divisions among people about the legality and morality of our participation in the Vietnam War. The anti-war demonstrations at Kent State and other colleges around the country, including the one at Washington University, grew from these divisions. Forcing Howard Mechanic to serve out a five- year sentence for an act (based on questionable evidence) that harmed no one is injustice of the most draconian kind when viewed in the context of the times. The Vietnam War era was one of the most turbulent in our recent history. There is no reasonable justification for the federal government to require Mr. Mechanic to serve out his original sentence. Doing so only prolongs the terrible legacy of the Vietnam War. The time for reconciliation and healing is long past.

I therefore respectfully request that you grant Mr. Mechanic's application for clemency.

Sincerely,



Robert O. Muller
President