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Iraq Veteran Undergoes Second Surgery After 2008 Police

Attack

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An Iraq war veteran has undergone a second surgery to treat wounds received when a police horse crushed his face during an anti-war demonstration outside of the 2008 Presidential Debates in New York.

Nick Morgan, a former Sergeant who served in Iraq from 2004-2005 with the 1st Cavalry Division, was standing on a sidewalk across from Long Island's Hofstra University with a group of uniformed veterans when they were attacked by police.

The veterans had been demanding a voice inside the debates concerning the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the treatment of returning veterans. "We wanted to ask a question at the

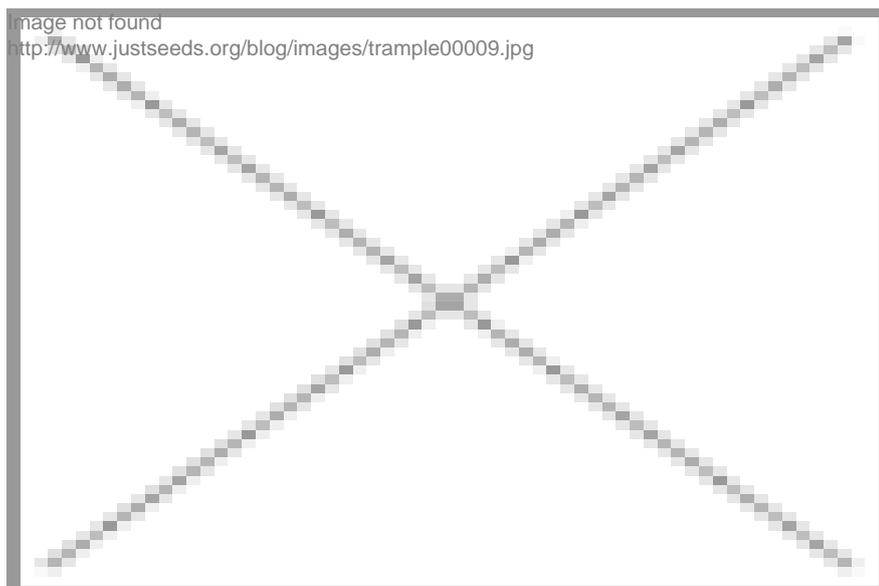
Presidential debate that was relevant to us”, Nick said in an interview Saturday. “The sad fact is that they wanted to keep the presidential debate closed... they didn’t want anyone directly effected by these issues to actually speak their mind.”



Veterans organized through Iraq Veterans Against the War gathered outside of the debates to follow large marches they had organized in Denver and St. Paul outside of the political conventions in the summer of 2008. They intended to keep pressure on both parties.

They were assembled outside Hofstra to demand entrance to the debates, which they said they had a right to do as veterans directly affected by the wars. After police denied them access, several veterans non-violently submitted to arrest. The police then turned violent, pushing the crowd of approximately 200 to 300 onto a sidewalk across the street from the University. At that point, police used batons and horses to push the crowd further, knocking Morgan and several others over.

It was then that the flashes of cameras illuminated a horrifying scene; a police horse which witnesses say had been wildly thrashing around throughout the night leaped in the air, landing it's hind legs directly on Nick Morgan's face. Luckily, a crushed cheekbone and orbital (the bone around his right eye), a concussion, severley bruised ribs, and a broken nose were the extent of Nick's injuries. It could has been worse.



“A lot of people thought I was dead on the spot.” Nick recalls. A uniformed soldier lay unconscious on the sidewalk, his blood-stained hat by his side. It was a scene more reminiscent of the wars than of a small demonstration on Long Island.

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http://www.nextleftnotes.org/NLN/photo-gallery/2008_10_15_hofstra/images/000002.jpg

I was one of the first witnesses to arrive at the scene along with a few of Nick's fellow Iraq veterans. As we knelt down to check on his vital signs and protect him from the hoofs around his face, we were pushed away by police who proceeded to drag him across the intersection, ignoring our calls for an ambulance.

Nick was thrown into a police van where he was denied medical attention. "I was told that I had declined medical treatment", he said. "My friends (fellow veterans and civilian allies) pleaded for medical attention, and I was eventually handcuffed to a gurney and brought to a hospital. I was handcuffed to a gurney the whole time I was in the hospital".

After receiving limited initial treatment, Nick was placed back in jail where he and 14 others were charged with Disorderly Conduct. The incident left Nick feeling "betrayed in the fact that I would expect more from officials of the state in regards to their treatment of military veterans who simply wanted to redress their grievances and be part of a legitimate dialogue in the mainstream on veteran issues."

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<http://www.squadron13.com/BillPerry/HofstraDebate/05.jpg>

A week later, Nick underwent surgery to keep his eye from sliding into his sinus cavity, and to hold the shattered bones in his face together. Absorbable plates were inserted around his eyes to keep his orbital bones together and a titanium plate remains screwed across his cheekbone. He coughed up blood and suffered bloody noses for two months after the attack, and his vision was impeded up until now by scar tissue in his eyelid, a complication from the first surgery.

On June 10, after a 7-month stay on a VA waiting list, a specialized surgeon seared Nick's original wound open to snip off the scar tissue. "There was a burning puff of flesh going across my face," Nick says, explaining how he was awake during the procedure, "a smell I'm unfortunately familiar with."

The successful surgery took 30 minutes and Nick is recovering well. But he will continue to deal with the effects of the attack, and he does not know if we will ever be able to sleep on the right side of his face again. "I also can't take pressure underwater very well," he says, "I wanted to be somewhat of a scuba diver before this."

LAWSUIT AND HEALING

Months after the arrests, all charges were dropped against the “Hempstead 15?”, but Nick and his team of allies would not let the story end here. They filed a lawsuit in September 2009 against the Nassua county police and several power-holders in the town of Hempstead. “The lawsuit is very lengthy,” he explained. “it includes violations of my 1st, 4th, 5th, and 14th amendments rights, as well as local civil rights and statutory laws.

The lawsuit centers around gross negligence, a charge that pales in comparison to the fact that he could have easily been killed had the horse’s hooves landed a few centimeters in one direction or the other.

“Nassau county police responded to the lawsuit in November with a motion to dismiss the case against me”, Nick told me, explaining that this was an attempt to silence him and shut the case. “In turn, we sent an amended claim, added another person to it, and fine-tuned the language of it.”

Currently Nick and his team are waiting for a Judge to move the case forward to open a discoveries period. “I can’t imagine any reason why the Judge would deny the case,” he says. “There’s overwhelming video footage, photos, and eye-witness accounts to the attacks.”

On December 15th, with the case against the Nassua County Police taking root, the case against Nick and the other “Hempstead 15?” were dropped.

On the other side of Nick’s shattered bones there’s emotional scars and trauma from the attack, which compound with his 70 percent Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder rating after his combat tour in Iraq.

Nick was in the Army Reserve was he got his orders to Iraq; “On Veteran’s Day 2003 I got a phone call saying pack your shit, we’re going.” This abrupt change would be the first in a series of hard experiences that would lead Nick to oppose the war. “I had to report two days later, withdraw from school, say my goodbyes... I had a day to pack up my life and go to war”. Two years after returning from Iraq, Nick found Iraq Veterans Against the War and became an active-member.

But the police attack at Hofstra forced Nick to step back from the work while he healed, and caused him to lose faith in the police. He told me that this loss of faith also “extends to our political process, which tends to make piss poor leadership decisions in this country, which as we can see, hasn’t gotten us in a very good place.”

Nick took a job with Veterans Green Jobs in Colorado, where he helped other veterans get on their feet with job placement and through environmental stewardship. More recently, he got re-involved again in Iraq Veterans Against the War, and in the newly formed UXO Tour, a music tour to help support veterans and active-duty military personnel who oppose the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Getting back involved and re-building connections helped Nick through the process, he told me. “Reintegrating into a community where I feel supported and nurtured really goes a long way in healing those mental wounds. I feel like I’ve come a long way in healing mentally from this.”

More information of Iraq Veterans Against the War can be found at www.ivaw.org [3]. For more on

the UXO Tour, see www.uxotour.com.

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Links:

[1] <https://indyreader.org/contributor/ryan-harvey>

[2] <http://voiceshakes.wordpress.com/2010/06/29/iraq-veteran-undergoes-second-surgery-after-2008-police-attack/>

[3] <http://www.ivaw.org/>