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Veterans Respond To Oakland Police Attack That Critically Injured Marine

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Scott Olsen served two tours in Iraq with the United States Marine Corps before coming home to a country lacking in jobs but thriving with high-level corruption. He “thought the banks pretty much run free and unregulated and are never held accountable for their actions,” his roommate and fellow veteran Keith Shannon told reporters.

Olsen was shot in the head Tuesday night with a tear-gas canister fired by Oakland police, fracturing his skull and causing his brain to swell. He had been marching with 2,000 others from Occupy Oakland after a brutal attack in the morning that ended with 100 arrests.

A participant of the Oakland protests who asked to remain anonymous told me over the phone Wednesday night that the march “was unbelievably peaceful” and that the attack “was totally unprovoked.”

“The police just let loose with teargas and flash bombs,” he said. “When was hit, the police were aiming their weapons directly at the crowd.”

Olsen’s friend and fellow veteran, Aaron Hinde, was at the Occupy San Francisco General

Assembly when he heard that a veteran had been critically injured in Oakland. When he realized it could be Olsen, whom he described as “one of the nicest and warmest people I’ve met in a while,” he and organizers from the Civilian-Soldier Alliance began calling local hospitals until they found Olsen at Highland Hospital in Oakland.

Hinde, 29, who served in Iraq with the 101st Airborne Division in 2003, told me that two off-duty EMTs who had been participating in the protests were said to have dropped Olsen off at the hospital.

“Now we are just waiting to hear from the neurosurgeon on if he’s going to need surgery or not,” Hinde said. “On top of that we are just waiting to see what kind of damage there is when he wakes up.”

[Graphic footage of Olsen’s injuries \[2\]](#) spread quickly around the Internet; the second high-profile story of veteran participation in the “Occupy Movement”. Last week, a video of another former Marine chastising a line of cops in New York for beating unarmed, peaceful people went viral.

The image of the 24 year-old with his camouflage jacket being carried while bleeding through the streets by frightened strangers may well be one that is remembered for decades as a snapshot of this moment in time.

Unfortunately, Olsen is not the first Iraq veteran to sustain potentially life-threatening injuries from a police attack while peacefully demonstrating. In 2008, former Sergeant Nick Morgan was crushed by a police horse in New York outside of the presidential debates as veterans and allies protested the Iraq-war and the treatment of veterans.

Morgan, who served in Iraq from 2004-2005 with the 1st Cavalry Division, was peacefully demonstrating outside of Hofstra University when Nassau County police attacked the crowd with horses and batons. As he was pulled to the ground, [a police horse’s hind legs came down on Morgan’s face, crushing his cheekbone and orbital, breaking his nose, and giving him a concussion \[3\]](#). Police pushed those trying to protect him away and dragged him unconscious across a large intersection where he was arrested.

A week after the attack, Morgan 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 under his right eye to reconstruct his shattered lower orbit and a titanium plate remains screwed across his cheekbone. For over a year his vision was impeded until a second surgery removed the scar tissue that was causing the complications.

Similar to the police attack on Morgan, when a crowd rushed to aid Olsen after he was knocked to the ground on Tuesday, a police officer lobbed a Concussion grenade into the crowd to disperse them, possibly furthering Olsen’s injuries.

Morgan and Olsen are both members of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW), whose members have been participating in occupations around the country. Morgan says that many veterans have been and will continue to participate in this movement because “we have offered to put our lives on the line for this country just to come home and see that our rights are being blatantly disrespected.”

Indeed, there is a special sense of betrayal that a veteran experiences when they realize that the

political system they risked their life defending is prepared and willing to attack them for voicing opposition to its policies.

“I have lost all trust in the ‘dignity and integrity’ of the government and their police forces,” Morgan continues. “I don’t feel safe in the presence of politicians or cops, I feel the opposite.”

In a press release sent out Wednesday, Iraq Veterans Against the War condemned the attack on Olsen and the Occupy Oakland march: “It’s ironic that days after Obama’s announcement of the end of the Iraq War, Scott faced a veritable war zone in the streets of Oakland last night.” The organization [has also established a fund for Olsen’s recovery](#) [4].

It’s not going to be an easy thing to deal with,” Morgan says of Olsen’s recovery. “The mental ramifications of this are difficult to deal with, I can attest to that.”

Morgan filed a lawsuit against the Nassua county police in 2009 for violations of his 1st, 4th, 5th, and 14th amendments rights, as well as a litany of New York State and civil rights, and he is currently awaiting a January conference to set a trial date. The Nassau County Police Department has refused to settle out of court.

“We need to hit them on as many fronts as we can, including in the courts,” he says of both his lawsuit and the current wave of “occupy” protests. “The only way these people will listen is when you start breaking down their modes of power.”

Hinde says that it should not be surprising to see more and more veterans and service-members getting active in this movement. “As veterans and active-duty service-members we are very aware of the national and world politics at play,” he told me. “We are aware of what’s going on, we are on the streets with the occupy movement, and we are the 99 percent.”

Wednesday night, as 3,000 people marched back to Oscar Grant Plaza in Oakland to tear down the fence and reoccupy it, a moment of silence was held in Chicago for Olsen and others injured by police violence, a solidarity march to be held in Tahrir Square in Cairo was announced via Twitter, and in New York, three marches snaked through downtown Manhattan chanting “New York is Oakland, Oakland is New York!”

Later, the Occupy Oakland general assembly voted 1607 to 46, with 77 abstentions, to call for a general strike of workers and students next Wednesday, November 2nd. Cities around the world are planning solidarity events as well.

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Links:

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

[2] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fclvV3BUbdE>

[3] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgOKgpWrT04>

[4]

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