
Aaron Hughes

*Operation First Casualty (OFC)* training day, March 2007. Top: Aaron Hughes, Garett Reppenhagen (standing). Bottom: Perry O'Brien (standing). Photos: Lovella Calica.

# Aaron Hughes

Aaron Hughes is one of the rare people I have interviewed where a one hour conversation could go straight to print with little to no edits. His reflections about the past were done with candor and his thoughts on the present were filled with a sense of urgency and calls for justice. Thankfully, this was not my first conversation with Aaron, or the first time that I have been inspired by his art and his activism.

To provide context, Aaron is an artist, an Iraq War veteran, and a member of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW). He was a student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign when his National Guard unit, the 1244th Transportation Company Army National Guard, was called to active duty on January 30, 2003.

Three months later, his Company was deployed to Kuwait. There he supported combat operations by transporting supplies from camps and ports in Kuwait to camps in Iraq. After three deployment extensions, totaling fifteen months, his Company was redeployed back to Illinois.

Hughes returned to the University of Illinois in the spring of 2005 and became a painting major. Photos that he took in Iraq served as the basis for many of his paintings. At U of I and in graduate art school at Northwestern University, he expanded his mediums to performance, video, book arts, and collage. Much of the work was about trying to make sense of his war experience.

In 2006, Hughes joined IVAW, a national membership organization consisting of veterans and active duty service members who have served in the U.S. military since September 11, 2001. IVAW currently has a membership of over 1700 people spread throughout the fifty states as well as Canada, Europe, and Iraq. IVAW has sixty-one active chapters, including six on military bases.

Aaron is currently an organizing team leader for IVAW and spends much of the year traveling to meet with various IVAW branches and helping to organize national actions. I had first heard about Aaron's work through a mutual friend, artist Michael Rakowitz. I was familiar with IVAW and had followed their work since the *Winter Soldier* hearings in Maryland in March 2008 (an event where soldiers delivered painful testimonials about their experiences). Additionally, I was deeply impressed by IVAW's *Operation First Casualty* action in New York City that I had seen on YouTube. In the video, veterans patrolled the streets of New York and used street theater to "bring the war home" to a disengaged American public.

I finally met Aaron at an event at Mess Hall (an experimental cultural center in Chicago) in February 2009. The event was a critique of graphics from the Justseeds Prison Portfolio and the print ephemera from Tamms Year Ten (an activist group working against abuses at the Tamms Prison in southern Illinois). Only at Mess Hall would one find close to forty people of diverse backgrounds having an intense dialogue about the meanings, successes, and shortcomings of political graphics for over three hours. Aaron and I met at the close of the event and this began a friendship and a number of collaborations. They include this interview, an ongoing project using mud stencils, and an upcoming street art and graphic outreach campaign between the Chicago chapter of IVAW and the Justseeds Artists' Cooperative that addresses the history of G.I. resistance, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the movement to stop the redeployment of soldiers with traumatic injuries.

Aaron's complex body of work seamlessly merges art, activism, and organizing. It

is a timely call for action and a call to build a broader movement to challenge the culture of militarism and the institutions that profit off war. IVAW is lucky to have Aaron in its ranks as an organizing team leader. The amorphous world of art and activism is lucky to learn about these tactics employed by a ragtag group of Iraq and Afghanistan War vets: veterans who are also artists, poets, musicians, and, more than likely, your neighbors.

This introduction and the following interview were written and conducted by Nicolas Lampert. The first interview session took place on December 15, 2009 in Chicago. A shorter, follow up conversation took place on August 9, 2010 where some recent projects were discussed. Portions of the earlier interview were first published in *Proximity Magazine*, issue 7, 2010.

**Nicolas Lampert (NL)**: Tell us why you first decided to enlist in National Guard.

**Aaron Hughes (AH)**: I was in high school. I was being raised by my single mother. At the time I had this longing or idea that I wanted to assert my manhood in some way. So I thought about the military and simultaneously I had applied to some schools. I had gotten in and a National Guard recruiter said, "Hey you can go to school and you can be in the military." I wanted to be independent from my mother. I wanted to get out of her house. I thought it was a good opportunity to go to school. Those were kind of my thoughts.

Simultaneously, my father had always looked up to his dad who was a corpsman in WWII and I thought serving my country was something I really could get into. I wanted to serve my community and sandbag the Mississippi – all those humanitarian relief kind of things. That's what I talked to my recruiter about – sandbagging the Mississippi River.

**NL**: What year did you join the National Guard?

**AH**: I joined in 2000. Fresh out of high school. I was eighteen years old.

**NL**: Did you ever believe that you would be sent to the Middle East when you first enlisted?

**AH**: [Laughs] No not at all. I really thought that the National Guard was there for natural disasters. I was in a tornado when I was a little kid. My parents grew up in New Orleans and had been through hurricanes, so the National Guard played this role in disaster relief and I really thought this was something I could do and something I could help out with. So that was what I was thinking.

**NL**: What was your reaction when your Company was being deployed to Kuwait?

**AH**: It was a Wednesday night. I was a junior at the University of Illinois. My platoon sergeant called and said I got good news, "We're getting deployed to Iraq." You have to report on Friday morning. So I just called my friends. We went to a basketball game. I went from there and got completely smashed. I got drunk as hell. That was my reaction.

**NL**: Your job was to transport supplies from camps in Kuwait to camps in Iraq. Tell us about that experience.

**AH**: It fluctuated a lot. We would be on missions that were a day long to three weeks long so

it really changed around. But what it consisted a lot of was waiting. Waiting in different camps to get loaded. Waiting to get unloaded. Waiting for convoy clearance. Waiting for a road to be considered drivable or safe enough for us to drive down. Even while we were on the road … waiting to get to the next point – waiting to get a wrecker out so that we could get our trucks fixed.

**NL**: Was your job to drive the truck?

**AH**: Yes. We would load the trucks and drive the trucks, and sometimes I would be the convoy commander depending on what type of mission we were running and how many people were involved.

**NL**: Did you document these experiences in a visual medium when you were in Iraq?

**AH**: I took photographs. At first, I took my nice camera over and I was thinking that I was going to take these really great photographs, but it got full of sand within the first month that I was over there. It didn't work any more, so we had these little disposable cameras, the kind

*Road Stop*, oil painting, 2006.

people used before digital cameras.

**NL**: The reoccurring imagery in your artwork from this experience is children. Explain the significance.

**AH**: First thing you see when you cross the border is this big concrete barrier, it's probably still there, and it says, "Iraq Border Ahead. Beware of Children in Roadway, 1000 Meters." That is the border between Iraq and Kuwait. That is where you lock and load. You put your flack vest on. You put your Kevlar on.

As soon as you cross the border, there are kids: little, little, tiny kids that are willing to jump on a semi-truck to get food or water. So my first reaction was that these kids are in such desperation that they are willing to jump on a moving truck to get anything. These are the kids that I'm going to help. Six months later, those kids are still there. Nine months later, they're still there. Twelve months later, they're still there.

**NL**: Did this experience lead you to start questioning the U.S. involvement in Iraq and turn you towards activism?

**AH**: Well, I wasn't turned towards activism at that point, but it got me to question the way that the United States conceives of using its military. There's this idea that our military can do nation building or humanitarian relief, but really it is designed to, and historically has always been used to oppress and to conquer.

That's the way you are trained. You're trained to destroy. You're trained to kill. You're trained to dehumanize. You're trained to take down little green silhouettes.

You're not trained to look at someone in the eye and see him or her as a human being. All of the Iraqis were viewed as the enemy. Yet, they were just people.

**NL**: Were you trained to think that the kids were potential enemies?

**AH**: No, but we where trained to not care about what happened to these kids and to see them as a threat. They where just "Hajjis" to us. There was this kind of game. We would chalk our truck with different stuff. One person chalked their truck with "Hajji fishing." They stuck a pole with a string on it, with a MRE [Meal, Ready-to-Eat] on it because these kids would go running

*Sign for Bread* from the book *Dust Memories*, 2006.

for the MRE and then get run over. It was just this joke.

People would save rocks in their cars to throw at the kids. I mean it changed. The first time all the kids were waiving and smiling and wanting food from us, and six months later they were starting to throw rocks at us.

**NL**: Sounds indicative of the entire climate in Iraq.

**AH**: It was. I watched this whole shift occur.

**NL**: What was the experience like returning to the U.S. after being in a war zone?

**AH**: [Long pause] That was a lot harder, in some ways than being over there. I came home expecting people to have changed. Or at least people to know how messed up things were in Iraq.

I remember my mom sending me this email of Bush running for re-election. I didn't even think he would run again. I thought he would be just shamed out of the presidency for how poorly the troops were taken care of, how poorly the whole mission had gone. I thought Donald Rumsfeld would be put on trial. And then I get home and received this email from my mom saying it looks like [Bush] has a good chance of winning the election. It blew my mind. I got home and called friends and everyone's life had kept going.

**NL**: What compelled you to return to school at the University of Illinois to study painting?

**AH**: When I was deployed, I had gone almost on this sort of spiritual journey. Going through all these different ideas of who I thought I was. It got to the point where I couldn't believe in anything. I couldn't believe in my country. I couldn't believe in religion. I couldn't believe in the education that I had been raised with. All of these institutions that had brought me up had crumbled except for one thing, and that was art, the idea that humanity can be shared through these creative gestures.

**NL**: Did creating art help you emotionally deal with your experiences in Kuwait and Iraq?

**AH**: I think it did and I am really thankful that I had art as a way to work through my experi-

*Don't Stop* from the book *Dust Memories*, 2006.

ences, but I didn't think of it that way at the first. I didn't even realize I was emotionally affected. I was really angry because our culture was so messed up. I didn't think about this idea of post-traumatic stress disorder, or anything like that.

**NL**: What were some of your early images like when you returned to school?

**AH**: I went to one of my professors and asked him to help me make a photo book of my experiences. I was thinking that I was going to have this nice clean photography book. Instead, he told me, "Why don't you go down to Kinko's and blow some of these images up and shrink some of them down?"

I did that and all of a sudden these photographs that were all of these posed images in front of starving kids or in these different places in Iraq, pretending to be Rambo, or this hero that I was never actually, looked different. They weren't concrete. They weren't my story. I could actually liberate my story out of them. I could actually start going back into them. Rework them and find what was true and honest to my experience. Something that was more real to me, or just more honest.

**NL**: That segues well to your *Tourist Photographs from Iraq*, the series of four foot by four foot oil self-portraits from photographs that you took while serving in Iraq. Explain this work.

**AH**: I grew up watching war films. My father and I would watch World War II films. John Wayne, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Black Hawk Down*. There is this whole mythology in our country of soldiers and of war. Soldiers are taught how to see themselves, how to act it out before even going over there. I mean we're acting as these liberators, these heroes. We're playing this role, deceiving ourselves.

After I had gotten home, I went on this big trip throughout the U.S. and Europe and I saw the same thing: people posing in front of the *Mona Lisa*. It wasn't about looking at the *Mona Lisa*. It was about possessing an image of you in front of the *Mona Lisa*.

I felt the same way about my experience in Iraq. It wasn't about me helping this kid that I was standing in front of. It was about me having a picture in front of this kid, so I could say, or pretend, to be this hero, that I never was. It was this voyeuristic idea of this space and also this idea of owning it.

**NL**: What was the impulse that you had when you first took the photos?

**AH**: We would be waiting somewhere to get offloaded and we would be like: "...let's take a picture of us here." So we would all get together. People would roll up their sleeves. Get out their weapons and stand there. We would all pose like we were Rambo or something.

**NL**: Did you spend time contemplating the meaning of your photos when you were in Iraq?

**AH**: I didn't develop any of my pictures overseas. All the rolls of film were mailed back to my mother and she developed them. I think it was a way of me letting her know that I was okay.

**NL**: The paintings, at least to me, also convey a sense of impending death: either the death of Iraqi civilians or the death of U.S. soldiers. Was that your intention with the images?

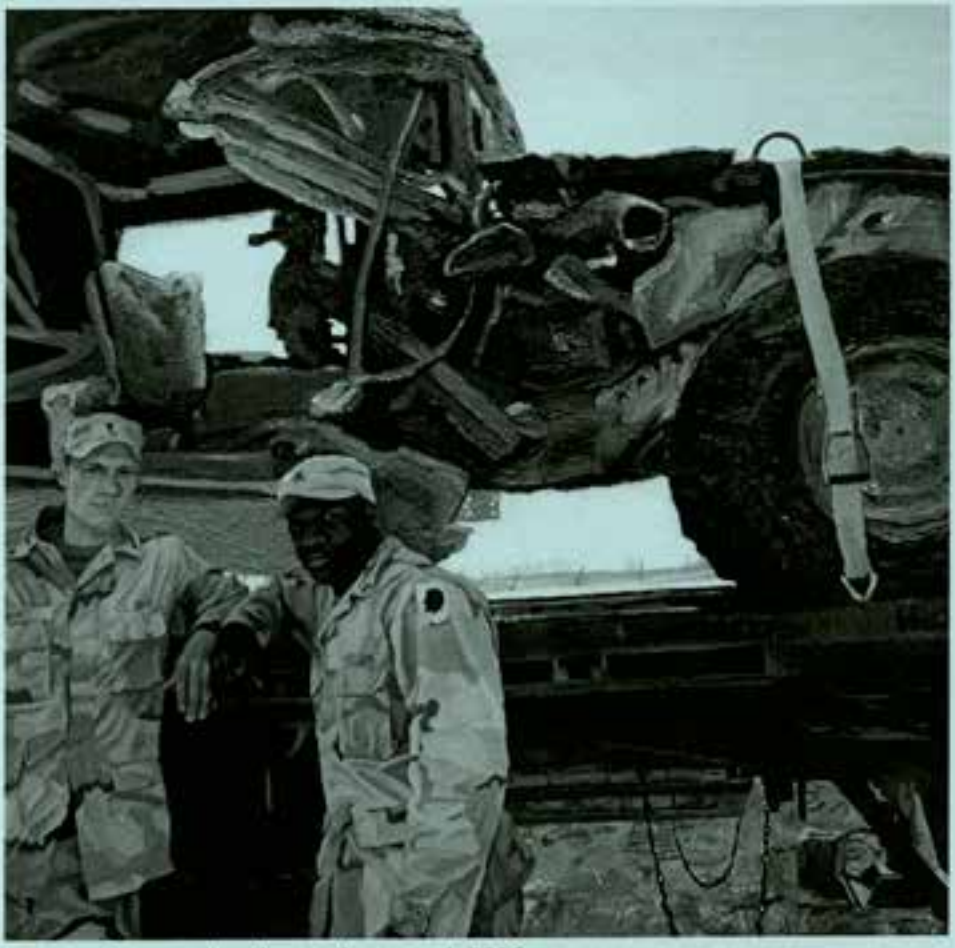
**AH**: I wanted to juxtapose them with the myth that we have of heroes. That was my interest. I wanted to be honest with them. I wanted to take my own image and take it apart and show how wrong it was. That is why I had the journal entries next to all of them.

I wanted to show how I posed in front of this crumbling Humvee where three soldiers had gotten killed. I'm holding this Maglite [flashlight] I pulled from the wreckage of the Humvee. Little tiny holes where burnt right through the whole, and I'm thinking about the kid that had this flashlight in his cargo pocket or on his belt, and the holes that where burnt right through them. And despite this I'm posing in front of it.

**NL**: So these paintings become a deeper critique of who you were at the time?

**AH**: Yes. I wanted to critique our culture but I thought the best way to do it was by critiquing myself – my own role, my own complicity, my own performance in this whole episode that is this "war on terrorism."

**NL**: One of the more powerful images from the series is a portrait of a soldier, which I assume



*I remember standing there*, oil on panel, 2006.

is you, with two ghost-like Iraqi kids in the near background. Part of your text that accompanies the image reads:

> This is how I wanted to see my self ...
> This is what I thought we would do in Iraq
> That's what I always thought we were about ...
> Barefoot, little kid s... I remember that one
> there ... he couldn't have been five years old
> Just a damn little kid, you know?

Could you please elaborate?

**AH**: I think what I wanted to convey was that I didn't know. I didn't know this kid at all. I didn't help him. Yet, that was the mythology of why we were there.

To us they were just part of the landscape. They were just part of this ornament that is Iraq. They're not real. They don't have real lives. I feel like that is that the big disconnect. People aren't seeing the Iraqis as people that have mothers, that have children. They struggle to put food on the tables, they fall in love, they make art. That is not how we saw them. They were foreign, something to take a picture of.

**NL**: Tell us about the series *Sublime Dust and the End*.

**AH**: It was about trying to create a chronicle of this journey. They were based off photographs and memories. My idea was really about the landscape. For me, there was a painful relationship. Dust covered my entire body and yet there was a continuing longing for something that is beautiful – like the idea that a sunset can be this huge redeeming thing in the day that is just so monotonous and anxious. I mean, how do these two things even fit together? I am driving through this hot desert, falling asleep, while I have this anxiety of running into an IED [Improvised Explosive Device].

*Sublime Dust and the End*, acrylic on panel, 2006-2007.

So I feel like those landscapes are my longing for this idea of beauty – this idea of redemption in that space. It's just this desperation.

There are a couple of other veterans I have talked to and they all talk about the same thing. That it gets to this point where you start looking for some type of beauty, something out there that you can hold on to, knowing that you're a human being and there is something hopeful in the world.

**NL**: You have also done performance work. One performance *Drawing for Peace* [Fall 2006] involved you setting up on a busy street intersection in Champaign, Illinois with a sign in the street that read:

> I am an Iraq War Veteran.
> I am guilty.
> I am alone.
> I am drawing for peace.

Tell us what transpired.

**AH**: Well, I put these barricades in front of the two corners of an intersection and I didn't talk to anyone. I just focused on the drawing.

**NL**: Were you on the sidewalk or in the middle of the street?

**AH**: I was in the middle of the street. I backed up all these buses. People predominantly carried on. A few people stopped and were like, "What is this?" That's all I wanted. I wanted people to stop for a moment. Just one fucking second and think about the war, think about veterans

*Drawing for Peace*, protest, 2006.

and the human cost of the war: Iraqi or American. I just wanted people to stop and think about it for a second.

**NL**: What was your interaction like with people during the performance?

**AH**: The only interaction that I had was with a police officer. At first he stood over me and told me to stand up, and I stood up, and he said, "I need you to get out of the street."

I didn't say anything. I just started drawing again. The whole time I never said anything to him. I didn't want to say anything to anyone, because it wasn't about what I was saying; it was about what I was drawing. He ended up dragging me out of the street by my arm and then I walked back into the street and kept drawing to try to finish this drawing.

I mean it was such a pathetic attempt to get people to stop. I think it was this momentary rupture, but it wasn't enough.

**NL**: How did it conclude? Did he arrest you? Did you stop? Did he pull you away again?

**AH**: I walked back out into the street and finished the drawing enough for people to see what it was. Then I picked up my stuff and walked away.

**NL**: What was the drawing of?

**AH**: It was a bird on barbed wire.

**NL**: Tell us about another performance in New York City where you did drawings on the sidewalk.

**AH**: It was a continuation of the *Drawing for Peace* project. I wanted to get other people in-

*Drawing for Peace*, protest, 2006.

volved in the project, so I put chalk out and asked people to draw for peace. I wanted people to stop and draw and think about issues that they perhaps might not be thinking about otherwise.

By inviting people to draw, I started seeing all these hexagons throughout New York that are kind of the bedrock of all the common and public spaces in the city. It really got me thinking about all of the mosaics and different tiles and Islamic geometry that I saw when I was deployed.

I started doing research and found that a lot of that geometry came out of Babylon, out of the sciences of Babylon. I thought how ironic it was that every day we're walking on this history, this very simple history where we discovered shapes and how to use them. We walk over it and don't think about it, just as we walk over Iraq and destroy it with out thinking about it.

**NL**: In a previous interview, you said, "I am political, however, I hope the artwork is not so much so – as I want it to be more of a testimonial than to fit into a larger political agenda. I just want to further understanding. I'm interested in creating a human understanding between emotions and experience." Tell us why you wanted to convey a more personal narrative.

**AH**: I wanted a human understanding and I still get extremely frustrated with the political rhetoric. I feel like there are different understandings of what political is, and I think I've come to learn that looking for some type of idea of humanity becomes political.

The Iraqis are really complex people and we're really complex people and you put all of these people together and take out all of the complexities and say instead that these are your enemies. You wind up killing each other. I feel like all of the nuances that make us human were left out, and that's what I longed for. I wanted some type of humanity to be brought back into the issue.

I had this feeling when I first got home that I wanted people to so badly have to deal with the war. I heard all these people yelling, "Hey President Bush, how many kids did you kill today?" Well, President Bush didn't kill any kids. He doesn't know what that feels like. He hasn't seen a kid die in front of him. He hasn't seen a dead corpse and felt like, "I killed this kid." That's something that people feel and deal with for the rest of their lives. It's not just a political game. It's a real human thing. You lose your own humanity when you take someone else's life, and I want people to deal with that. And that transcends the idea of a political rhetoric that gets thrown around.

I don't care about the left or the right, or all that crap. I want people to get down to the human essence of the situation. And I think that is what I was trying to express at the time and am still trying to express.

**NL**: When did you become involved in Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW)?

**AH**: In 2006.

**NL**: Was this at the beginning stages of IVAW?

**AH**: IVAW was formed in 2004 at a Veterans For Peace conference. It was two years old at the time and had already grown from the founders to close to 200 members when I joined.

At the *United For Peace and Justice* march in January of 2007, twenty-six IVAW members attended. That was the largest gathering of IVAW members up to that point and was right at the moment when the organization decided to start forming chapters.

At the end of 2006, we changed from being a speakers bureau (where churches or organizations could call IVAW and ask for a veteran to speak at an event) to a membership-run organization where we are running our own events, organizing our own chapters, and working on our own campaigns and issues. I came in right at that shift.

**NL**: Did you attend the *Winter Soldier* hearings in Maryland in 2008?

**AH**: Yes. I did. I played a role to help organize the *Winter Soldier* hearings. In fact, during my first encounter with IVAW members in January of 2007, I brought up the idea of holding another *Winter Soldier* meeting to Garett Reppenhagen who was the IVAW Chair of the Board at the time. And he put me in contact with Fernando Braga, who was a member out in New York, who was also interested in the *Winter Soldier* hearings, and we spent a lot of time talking and discussing ideas. During the course of 2007, we began to develop the idea of a *Winter Soldier* hearing, and I became a leader of the outreach team and spent most of my time calling members and trying to convince them to come out, or making sure that their transportation was covered.

**NL**: How many people attended the hearings?

**AH**: Around 350.

**NL**: Tell us about the testimonies.

**AH**: It was three days in Maryland, just outside of D.C. at the Labor College and there were 225 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who came to testify, or to support other testifiers. We had over ninety members of IVAW testify over those three days. And we had panels on everything from rules of engagement and war crimes, to sexual assault and sexual harassment. Also discussed were sexism within the military, racism within the military, issues of trauma, post-traumatic stress, and the poor support that soldiers were receiving for what they had been through.

**NL**: What type of media coverage did the hearings receive?

**AH**: We got a lot of great coverage from the independent media channels. *Democracy Now!* covered us throughout the entire event. Pacifica Radio did so as well. There were European news outlets that covered the entire event. *The Army Times*, *The Marine Times*, and *The Navy Times* wrote articles

In regards to the mainstream media, we were pretty much blocked out. *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times* did not cover the event and *The Washington Post* wrote a small article.

**NL**: I assume the event was inspired by the *Winter Soldier* hearings during the Vietnam War.

**AH**: Yes. It was totally inspired off of that testimonial series. The film *Winter Soldier* – a doc-

umentary that had come out after their hearing – inspired me, and had inspired others to reinvigorate the project, and to reuse it.

The Vietnam-era *Winter Soldier* hearings were showing the world that war crimes were a systemic reality within our foreign policy. When the media catches onto a specific event it really hypes it as a one-off event. What we were trying to do was show that this was not a one-off event – it is systemic within the military, and its happening on an ongoing basis. And I think you can see this today, with the recent Wikileaks [situation] and Ethan McCord speaking out about war crimes; we need to reevaluate our role in other people's countries.

**NL**: Shifting gears, lets talk about IVAW's use of cultural resistance. Creative forms of protest seem to run central in so many of the IVAW projects. How did this arise? Did it develop organically out of individual IVAW chapters and various interests of the members? Or did it start from a mandate or discussion on tactics when the organization was first started?

**AH**: Our central organization has never been strong enough in relationship to locals to mandate anything. There is a real fear with being authoritative within a veteran community when you're coming from a completely authoritarian structure such as the military. There is a real hesitancy and anxiety around that, so the creative aspects of IVAW did not come from a mandate. I think what it came out of, if I can look at a different perspective, is the war

War is such a destructive force. A part of the healing process, or a part of transforming out of that person who was part of that destructive process, is doing things that are creative – producing culture and finding a way to tell stories that are constructive instead of destructive.

I know that sounds really simple, but I really think that is a primary reason why people get involved with IVAW, and stay involved.

**NL**: Do you know how *Operation First Casualty* first started, how it developed?

**AH**: [Laughs] Yeah, I know about how it developed. It developed out of the January 27, 2007 march. That was the largest gathering at that point.

**NL**: That was in D.C. right?

**AH**: That was in D.C. After the march there was a day of lobbying, and a couple of IVAW members attended, and after it we went out for beers at this bar called Madam's Organ. We were drinking beers and actually singing karaoke. I remember Garett [Reppenhagen], Geoff [Millard], and I all got up and sang "Bohemian Rhapsody." [Pause] "Momma, I just killed a man." That's kind of ironic.

We were sitting there and we were really angry. We were pissed off about the march. All these people had come in from out of town and arrived on a Saturday – a time when representatives aren't even in Congress. President Bush isn't there. He's not in the White House. He's in Texas, in Crawford.

And there's this huge march. But everyone goes home afterwards. Everyone goes and sleeps in their own beds. No one's willing to sacrifice to deal with the war.

So we were pissed off. How do we make people deal with the war? Deal with it in a way where it's a part of their life?

Garett, at the time, was the Chair of the Board and he was one of the main organizers

of IVAW. He said, "I really think we should make this big statue of President Bush and tear it down in front of the White House." Similar to what we did with the Saddam Hussein statue in Baghdad, and it could be this big performance.

I was just kind of listening to Geoff and Garett talk because I was so new. Then Jeff said that he wanted to do this *Operation Raw* thing where in the '70s, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War did this sixty-mile road march, where they marched through all these small communities in the Northeast with mock weapons and patrolled these little towns as if they were in Vietnam to force people to deal with the war at that time. And they all had whiteface on to highlight that there was a racial issue and it was about racism.

I was really interested in the idea of spectacle and rupturing public space, so I suggested that we do that in front of Fox News' headquarters. "Why don't we bring that shit straight into Fox News' headquarters and do it right there in front of them. And if they're still going to ignore us, the fact that they are ignoring us in front of their headquarters … if they're ignoring the war on their doorstep, then that just shows how blind they are to reality."

Eventually, the idea segued to talking about doing combat patrols in multiple areas of D.C. – the Capitol, the White House, the Washington Monument, Union Station.

We got really excited about it and were trying to figure out how to actually perform it. Geoff suggested that we carry pink water guns. I think Garett said something about wood batons. And I was like, "No, they're going to kill us." We really thought that if we had fake weapons, the secret service would kill us.

I said, "We all know what it's like to carry a weapon. Why don't we just know what's in our hand and use that memory, that muscle memory, to show that we have weapons? Perform it, because it was a performance when we were overseas."

We discussed it some more, and finally I was like, "Look, we don't need to use any of that stuff. We can just use our memories and that will be more powerful than anything we


Gordon Chance (center), *OFC Washington DC*, March 2007. Photo: Lovella Calica.

can do."

To convince them, I just jumped up and yelled, "Halt!" Everyone in the whole bar just stopped and the bartender's beer starts pouring over. We were like, "Okay. That's what we've got to do."

Geoff and Garett spent a lot of time for the next month and half pulling the resources together. They came up with the name *Operation First Casualty [OFC]* because the first casualty of war is truth.

**NL**: Where did *OFC* happen first?

**AH**: Washington D.C. on March 19th. We did it at eight-o-clock in the morning at rush hour over at Union Station, the main train station.

**NL**: You're in full military uniforms?

**AH**: Well, we're in full military uniforms, but we didn't have battle rattle on. We didn't have Kevlars on, or flack vests on, or LBVs, or weapons. But our posturing, our awareness of what it means to carry those weapons, to be in a combat patrol, brought it to a reality.

Charlie Anderson (center), *OFC Washington DC*, March 2007. Photo: Lovella Calica.

**NL**: What was the public reaction?

**AH**: It scared people. There were a lot people that didn't know what to do. The police didn't know what to do. They weren't sure if this was a military thing at first, or if this was some type of performance, or street performance. It really ruptured that space.

We took eight detainees right there in front of the train station.

**NL**: Were the detainees friends of yours or were

they random people in the crowd?

**AH**: No, we had done a whole training session the day before, practicing with volunteers. They all volunteered to take part. We wanted them to play the role of American civilians. They weren't supposed to pretend to be anything they were not. They were just supposed to react to what they'd feel like if someone was detaining them or detaining one of their friends, and having a weapon pointed in their face.

**NL**: I imagine that people on the streets were terrified by this action.

**AH**: They were. The public does not understand the terror of a combat patrol moving through your city, and couldn't understand from the media coverage that they were exposed to. At that time, there was a lot of discourse about how the Iraqis weren't stepping up and defending their own communities. There was no understanding of the terror of having a patrol in your neighborhood every single day. The not knowing – if someone's going to come and pick you out of your home in the middle of the night.

**NL**: Did your patrols in D.C. force any type of police reaction?

**AH**: Yes. They did. When we were doing the action on the U.S. Capitol lawn there was a line of civilians waiting to go into the Capitol. We did the action right near them and it scared a lot of them and it scared this one father. It didn't scare his kids, but it scared the father and he started complaining to the cops and the cops started following us.

The cops actually surrounded us and a couple of SUVs pulled up. We were still on the Capitol grounds and as soon as we saw that the police were starting to surround us, we immediately got into a formation, which is what we practiced the day before.

We had a police liaison stand in front of our formation. When the cops came up to us they really did not know what to do. We were more organized than they were. We were more disciplined than they were. All of a sudden they realized that we were not this mob that they could go up to and pull one person aside. They had to deal with us as a community, as a force together.

After some time, they ended up asking us to leave the premises. We went off and didn't return to the Capitol but we did go to some other places including the White House.

**NL**: What happened at the White House? Were you harassed by the police there?

**AH**: No, but the snipers on top of the White House were definitely following us and that was kind of intimidating. Garett Reppenhagen who was leading the patrol, was a sniper in Iraq, so you know how far away you are from being popped off. So we were really aware of the situation and the fear that we incited by our action.

**NL**: You did a similar action in New York City?

**AH**: Well *OFC* keeps happening. There was an *OFC* that happened when President Obama announced the escalation. There was one that I didn't even know about that happened in Seattle just a couple of weeks ago.

That first year in 2007 we did *OFC*s in New York, D.C., Chicago, Los Angeles, and Denver.

**NL**: What were the reactions in New York at Times Square?

**AH**: [Pause] You know that particular action was a real mess because we kind of got confused on who all the civilians were and we ending up pushing into some people that were real civilians. There was a moment of fear. Veterans are these young kids – eighteen and nineteen, and we're patrolling New York. We were forcing the public to make a lot of jumps in their understanding. I think that's where the rupture comes in, where the trauma comes in. So, I don't know how successful that was at that moment, or what that was like. I guess I don't know how to tell it.

I just remember it was extremely fucking hot that day. It was like a fucking patrol. We're hot. We're tired. We don't have enough water. We'd been at this now for a couple of hours. Here we are, we're doing it again. "You guys ready. You two hit that corner we're going to take down this person. All right. Go. Boom." Take in the action. Everyone's yelling, screaming. "Take those two people down." "All right let's move on before the cops come here because we don't want to deal with them." Everyone was in that mindset, and in fact, that's one of the reasons why the whole action died out, because of how traumatic it was for our members.

Afterwards, we would do these rap sessions. Everyone was like, "I wanted to fucking knock the shit out of people when I was doing these patrols." It would click in your head that there was this anger – you stop seeing Americans for a moment. You just see these people that you're angry with. It's just this idea of dehumanizing them to the point where there's anxiety. You want to knock them over. You want to pull the trigger. It's part of the whole mentality. That

Adam Kokesh, Garett Reppenhagen, *OFC Washington DC*, March 2007. Photo: Lovella Calica.

whole military training came back for a lot of us, and trying to process that back through was really hard.

I think we were performing something that we didn't want to be anymore, and that's a lot of reason why that action was so powerful, and why we couldn't keep doing it, why it wasn't sustainable. It was literally destroying our membership in some ways.

**NL**: Looking back at it with some distance, were you influenced by other types of guerilla street theater and it's history?

**AH**: Not in a really in-depth historical way. I had been interested in how other groups had tried to rupture different spaces, whether that was Critical Mass or Reclaim the Streets or this group called Improv Everywhere. I was just interested in how people were dealing with public spaces and trying to break through them – groups like the Yes Men. I think that was there, but I don't think that conversation was there in most all of us.

The real conversation was we wanted to show America what it means to deal with a patrol. We wanted to show people reality. What it means to take a detainee. That was the important thing.

There was an anger we had with American culture and we wanted people to deal with what we were dealing with emotionally and psychologically.

**NL**: Tell us about the importance of documenting *Operation First Casualty* through the internet and the mainstream press.

**AH**: We sent a big press release out on the first one and we were lucky that *The Washington Post* did a big article on it. Some of the independent media video people covered it.

None of us knew if it was going to be on the news or not. At first it was all about bringing it to the people on the streets – the people who were going to deal with it immediately. But it was the mediation that became the real breaker.

The first question was how is the media going to cover it. It wasn't, "Did we affect those people in the street?" It was "How did the media cover it?" That always stuck with me on just how powerful the media is.

**NL**: So, the YouTube films of *Operation First Casualty* actions were filmed by Indymedia, and not by IVAW?

**AH**: Yes. Indymedia volunteered to film some of the actions. None of it was IVAW. In Chicago, Labor Beat and a couple indy groups filmed it. They gave us edited clips of it for free because we asked for them. But at that time we were not consciously thinking, "let's make a film." It was about the direct interaction with the people first. Later on it became about YouTube and the mediation of it. That's just really interesting, where you're trying to get to the real and the mediation becomes the message.

**NL**: *Operation First Casualty* shatters the media image of veterans as patriotic and uncritical of the government and war. Explain how IVAW deals with public perceptions that praise people who serve in the military, but largely look down on people who protest and go against the grain.

**AH**: [Long pause] I don't think there is a specific way that we have dealt with that. We don't take politicians, generals, media pundits, spokespeople, and officers in the military seriously. That's not the military.

Predominantly the military is a bunch of kids that don't give two shits about Iraq. They don't give two shits about Afghanistan. They are over there because they're getting a paycheck and because they care about their buddy next to them. It's not about those moral or larger ideas that are continually written about.

There are very few people over there who think it's this larger democratic, moral work. When it gets drummed up that way, we just don't take it seriously. We just don't respond to that.

We've had members who have been on all the different talk shows and they are confronted about this and its basically – those people haven't served. They don't know.

Veterans are homeless. Veterans are dealing with domestic abuse. Some veterans are alcoholics. I mean we have the highest suicide rate. Those are veterans, so I don't know who they are talking about.

I think with veterans, overall, there is this belief in America, but it's not a blind patriotic belief.

**NL**: I'm curious about how projects like *Operation First Casualty* or the *Combat Paper Project* become an IVAW action. Do individual chapters of IVAW have autonomy to do actions and creative forms of protest on their own accord or do they have to run by ideas through some sort of central national organization since it represents IVAW. For instance, could members object to a proposed project because they dislike how it represents IVAW?

**AH**: We are a bottom up organization the only way that it gets to the point where approval is needed is when it comes to money. Like if something is going to cost a lot of money that we don't have. Then, there has to be some type of approval or some type of way to pay for it. In that case, the executive director or the board will get involved. But with the *Combat Paper Project*, *Operation First Casualty*, *Winter Soldier* – all of those just started. Those were members that got together and said, "Hey, we want to do this. How do we do it?" And just by the process of trying to grow a project, you get by, and you talk to other chapters, other members. You try to get them involved. Because the more people that get involved, the stronger and the more powerful that action is going to be.

**NL**: So actions by individual chapters reflect the interests and the personalities of the people involved?

**AH**: Yes. Some groups are more focused on reading groups. Other chapters, like the one up in Milwaukee, are focused on helping homeless veterans and do not do a lot of creative stuff, right now. So it just depends. Los Angeles, because they got hooked up with Brave New Films … first they did that video [intervention at a gas station where 4,171 toy soldiers were set up on the ground of a gas station at 3 AM]. Then, they did the whole *Rethink Afghanistan* push, which is mostly IVAW members who have taken on this whole other project.

**NL**: It just seems from an outside perspective that the IVAW creative projects have a lot of support within a membership of 1,700 people. Am I wrong about that? Or is there disagreement

and dislike for the use of creative protest among factions of the members?

**AH**: I would not say that our organization is a 100%, safe, trustful space. We are veterans dealing with PTSD that tend to lash out at the people that care about us most. That is a tendency with people that have PTSD.

We are learning politics. We are learning the nuances of, and the histories, of progressive movements, and different ideological perspectives and all of that gets played out in our organization. Political debates, ideological debates exist. We recently had a huge debate about non-violence, so I wouldn't say there is a consensus. There is a lot of mud throwing. But simultaneously, when it comes to doing a project, people get excited.

People want to do stuff. IVAW members want to get out and do stuff. They get pissed off if we spend too much time talking and not enough time doing. And I think that is the complete opposite of most groups and organizations.

Our membership wants to get out and do stuff. So when something is creative and exciting and seems inspiring like *Warrior Writers*, *Combat Paper*, *Operation First Casualty*, or *Winter Soldier*, or something that could challenge the everyday, challenge this country to deal with the war, our members want to get out there and do it. They want to participate in it. They want to get in people's faces and force people to deal with the wars and make a choice. So, I think that's where the cohesion comes. But, simultaneously, I don't want to give you a false portrayal of IVAW. Ideological fights exist.

**NL**: You could say that about many organizations with a diverse membership.

**AH**: That's what brought down Students for a Democratic Society, and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) – positions on non-violence and all these different things that tore these organizations apart. I'm hoping that we can communicate and can learn from those organizations and how they got divided.

We've had infiltrators. We had this guy out in Denver that worked for the government. We had someone at Fort Lewis that worked for the Fort Lewis Military Base that was involved.

**NL**: Now that the organization is six years old, what is the present focus of IVAW?

**AH**: We assessed the work that we had done over the past five years. We had done massive direct actions, large events, testified to Congress about war crimes and we still didn't end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

So we began to look at organizations that had made concrete wins over the past ten years – organizations like the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Florida and the United Workers in Baltimore. So we changed our organizing model to one of leadership development and campaign development that is really about developing a power base that can directly challenge the institutions that are perpetuating the war.

**NL**: What are some of the campaigns that you are working on in 2010?

**AH**: Well, we just had a large training with the Immokalee Workers and the United Workers and we came out of the training with our first ever campaign. It's going to be a campaign to

stop the deployment of traumatized soldiers and make sure that they receive adequate and immediate care.

The reason why this is such a strategic campaign is because one third of the military is on psychotropic drugs and is still being deployed over seas. Taking out one third of the military's force would cripple their ability to continue these occupations.

**NL**: Returning back to the creative actions by IVAW, what have been some new tactics?

**AH**: Well, mud stencils have been a recent focus. Our first mud stencil action was in Pittsburgh at the G-20 Conference in September of 2009. Part of our new organizing model is to develop the culture within our organization, and a lot of that has to come from the creative energy and empowering energy. And moving away from some of the negative energy that I think can be utilized in organizing, but really burns people out. I think we saw that after *Operation First Casualty*.

I learned about the mud stencil technique from you and I was really amazed by the type of imagery that could be done with it. I saw the images from the Tamms prison project in Chicago and I was thinking that this is something that IVAW can use. Especially since the dirt is almost like a metaphor for how GIs and veterans are treated. We are treated like dirt and that's the message that we wanted to bring to the G-20 protests – that the corporate elite are profiting off the war and we're treated like dirt.

**NL**: What was the text of your stencils?

**AH**: "We will not sacrifice for your profits."

**NL**: What kind of surfaces did you put the mud stencils on?


IVAW Fort Hood members Mike Kern, Chance Mills, and Jeff just outside Fort Hood Texas mud stenciling. October 2009. Photo: Aaron Hughes

**AH**: We stenciled a large soldiers and sailors memorial in Pittsburgh. Our message was that soldiers and sailors have always sacrificed, but many times it has not been for country and for their people. It has been for other people's profits – especially in the current wars. Our message was that we are done working for your profits.

**NL**: Did the police harass you when you were putting up the stencils?

**AH**: Yes. They came out pretty quickly. We had mounted police officers and a row of riot cops. We also had Homeland Security confront us. They all surrounded us. We just formed up and told them what we are doing. We told them that we had informed the police that we were going to be doing this, that we are veterans and GI's and that this is mud, and we have a right to be using freedom of speech to express ourselves. They left us alone and stood there and watched us the entire time.

**NL**: Amazing. Tell me what some of the reactions have been by IVAW members when they go out mud stenciling.

**AH**: Well, you use your hands in the action and members really started to feel empowered in what they were doing.

The tactic has spread between chapters. Joyce Wagner who is head of the IVAW chapter in Pittsburgh took it to DC in March. I went down to Fort Hood, this is before the shootings in October, and we did mud stenciling all across Killeen, Texas asking the simple question, "Do you know what you're fighting for?"

I think for the folks down in Fort Hood it was a new way of doing outreach. They had passed out flyers before, but this was a new level. It was really visible. It was at a larger scale. And they felt empowered because no one was harassing them, they really got behind the action.

We also had folks doing it in Madison on the anniversary of the occupation. It was great because we were out in the streets. We don't just have to hold a sign. We can tell a story and leave our mark – a mark that will remain.

**NL**: Tell us more about the mud stencil action in Madison. The artist Dan S. Wang has some pretty incredible footage of that event on his site and that was re-posted on the Justseeds website. It would be good for readers to hear more about what transpired.

**AH**: We stenciled across the University, but we also specifically went to a recruiting station and we stenciled outside their doors on the sidewalk.

**NL**: What was the text?

**AH**: It was specifically around recruitment. Counter recruitment messaging. Trying to let soldiers know the truth about being in the military. The action was at an Armed Services Career Center – that is what they are called now, and we basically put messages in front of each office door.

The Marine recruiter who was working came out and we had a dialog with him and he expressed a lot of the same issues and concerns that we had. We were telling him that he has a freedom to express himself and that is what we were doing. I think that dialog was really

useful. There was a recruit there; I don't think that recruit was going to be coming back.

**NL**: Did the police show up?

**AH**: Yes. They basically took everyone's ID, started asking us questions, and basically told us that we had to leave. So we packed up, but we did stencils at other locations.

**NL**: It seems from this project and so many other IVAW actions, from the *Winter Soldier* hearings on down, that IVAW is really learning about various past and present tactics from other movements and adapting them to your current work.

**AH**: Absolutely. I feel like there's not very much time spent on understanding how organizations or movements have succeeded in the past. There are assumptions that are made, but not enough inquiry into really learning about what transpired.

I mean, what was the outline that was used for those successes and how did people win in the past. That question inspired me to get into the streets. From an artistic perspective I learned about Reclaim the Streets and Critical Mass and these different artists that were using public performances. That's kind of how I envisioned working with IVAW – these public performances that became part of the process.

I saw a lot of what was happening in the 50s and 60s with the Civil Rights Movements as a performative act. It was very well designed. I wanted to learn about the work and the depth behind the performances. That is the important research that is needed, the work to understand how to win.

IVAW was able to pull off these symbolic and aesthetic actions, but that doesn't mean that we were able to win. And I think I've been asking the question, "How do we win?" Because I'm tired of these occupations, I'm tired of these wars. I'm tired of the idea that when I am sixty years old there is going to be another generation going off to another senseless war. The question becomes for me, really clearly, how do we systemically change that system. There are models that have been used in the past that have succeeded.

**NL**: What models come immediately to mind?

**AH**: SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee]. It is important to look at how SNCC challenged racism, and did so in a way where it empowered the whole community. That work in the '50s and '60s led into other movements – the Women's Liberation Movement, the anti-war movement. SNCC inspired other organizations and how they were structured.

**NL**: Through your research on SNCC, what else have you learned about them that has changed your thinking about IVAW organizing?

**AH**: Well, for one, they really tried to acknowledge what they were up against. Racism was not just Jim Crow laws. It was cultural. It was rooted in how people were raised and educated. To challenge that, they had to go that deep. And I think militarism is that deep in our country. It runs that deep.

So the question begins, how do you challenge it at that systemic level? SNCC began to look at their resources and they began to look at where they could make the most change.

They didn't say we can make the most change in the North because it may be easier to sway the politics there. They said if we take on the most racist state in our nation and we win there then we will win everywhere in the United States, so they made a conscious decision to invest their resources into Mississippi.

So, I think IVAW is spending a lot of time over the last year developing leadership and identifying where we have power and where we don't have power. And we have spent a lot of time developing a campaign, and we have never had a campaign before. And now with this new campaign to stop the deployment of traumatized soldiers, we have to ask ourselves, where are the military bases that are deploying the most traumatized soldiers? How many soldiers has Fort Hood deployed every month to Iraq and Afghanistan? And what would it take for those soldiers to stop being deployed?

Overall, I think the anti-war movement needs to generate that type of focus and invest its resources into some of these military installations that are sending hundreds of thousands of soldiers overseas every year. We need to stop that.

**NL**: So you are talking about a shift in people's thinking in how they approach the anti-war movement.

**AH**: Yes. Bases can be shut down. Cities have been shut down. Look at examples of Seattle [1999 World Trade Organization protests] and San Francisco [1934 Waterfront General Strike]. Military bases are structured a lot like a city. It's actually a lot like a college campus with dormitories across the whole installation. Bases are not as closed as society perceives them to be. It's more like a city than a fort where everyone's behind a bunker.

That city depends on the outside world to exist, and because of that, there are ways to challenge that space. So, how do you organize to actually begin to challenge that? That is the key question, but I think the potential does exist for creating change.

**NL**: Culturally what needs to take place to get the public to respond to this movement?

**AH**: Well, culture is a way of reaching the communities that are sending the largest numbers of its youth to these wars. Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed* is a tool that is being used over and over again. Freedom Schools are another tool.

How are we teaching our society about militarism? I think that culture and using art helps begin the process. It asks the hard questions and is one way to reach out to communities that have not been involved in the past.

It's not about telling those communities that they have to be involved. It's about working with them, working in solidarity with them, understanding their situation, and asking questions, posing questions. It's about working in rural communities and inner city communities, and really looking at the situation at hand. It's linked to poverty. It's linked to a lack of choices. It's linked to oppression in itself, and the military – another oppressive force – offers itself as that outlet.

I think creative people and artists need to write a different type of narrative, and need to ask questions. They need to question those institutions that are oppressing poor people and use creative actions.

Creative actions force people to choose a position. Depoliticalization is all about not having to choose. Not having to deal with conflict. Not having to have a position. Creative work changes that. It forces people to deal with war.

# Groups and Projects Discussed in the Interview

Iraq Veterans Against the War
IVAW is an advocacy group of active-duty military personnel, Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, and other veterans who have served since the September 11, 2001 attacks. IVAW has over 1,700 members and 61 chapters in 48 states, overseas, and on military bases. IVAW opposes the US occupation of Iraq and advocates immediate withdrawal of all occupation forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. Additionally, IVAW advocates for adequate health care for all veterans and active duty soldiers.
ivaw.org

Improv Everywhere
Public performance and creative actions. Based in New York City.
improveverywhere.com

Critical Mass
Monthly bicycle ride to celebrate cycling and to assert cyclists' right to the road. Typically held on the last Friday of every month in over 300 cites.
critical-mass.info

Reclaim the Streets
Direct action, anti-capitalist street parties.
rts.gn.apc.org

The Yes Men
Anti-corporate pranksters and activists.
theyesmen.org

Rethink Afghanistan
Documentary film and progressive organization focused on foreign policy and the war in Afghanistan.
rethinkafghanistan.com

Combat Paper Project
Project initiated by Drew Matott and Drew Cameron where military uniforms are turned into paper for creative expression. The project involves war veterans, activists and artists.
combatpaper.org

Winter Soldier
Testimony from U.S. veterans who served in those occupations, giving an accurate account of what is really happening day in and day out, on the ground.
ivaw.org/wintersoldier

Students for a Democratic Society
Radical, multi-issue student and youth organization. Founded in 1960s, resurrected on January 16, 2006 with over 100 active chapters in high schools, colleges, universities, and cities all over

the country.
studentsforademocraticsociety.org

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
Civil Rights Movement organization that focused on field work, voter registration drives, freedom rides, and played a leading role in the 1963 March on Washington, Mississippi Freedom Summer, and other actions.
ibiblio.org/sncc

Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Florida
The CIW is a community-based organization of mainly Latino, Mayan Indian and Haitian immigrants working in low-wage jobs throughout the state of Florida. Actions have included community-wide work stoppages, hunger strikes, a historic 230-mile march from Ft. Myers to Orlando in 2000, and a national boycott of Taco Bell calling on the fast-food giant to take responsibility for human rights abuses in the fields where its produce is grown. Subsequent campaigns also targeted McDonalds, Burger King, and supermarket chains, all of which created victories and new agreements to increase wages and workers rights.
ciw-online.org

United Workers
United Workers is a human rights organization based in Baltimore, Maryland, of low-wage workers committed to addressing the root causes of poverty and universal human rights. United Workers was founded in 2002 by homeless day laborers. Campaigns have included the Living Wages at Camden Yards Campaign that resulted in wages for cleaners at the stadium being raised from $4.50 an hour to the state's living wage rate of $11.30 an hour.
unitedworkers.org

## Further Reading


Iraq Veterans Against the War and Aaron Glantz, *Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008.

Iraq Veterans Against the War, *Warrior Writers: Re-Making Sense*, self published book, 2008.

Aaron Hughes and Nada Shalaby, *Passing Notes: Memories of Kuwait*, self published zine.

Dahr Jamail, *The Will to Resist: Soldiers Who Refuse to Fight in Iraq and Afghanistan*, Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2009.

Richard Stacewicz, *Winter Soldiers: The Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 1997.

David Cortright, *Soldiers in Revolt: G.I. Resistance During the Vietnam War*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005 (orig. pub. 1975).

## TEMPORARY CONVERSATIONS

We have a great appreciation for the interview format. When researching a favorite subject or person, it seems we always prioritize the interview as a primary source of information and inspiration. Essays can be effective too, but reading about someone's work, in their own words, often with a tone that makes you feel like you are sitting in the room with them, is particularly satisfying and sometimes feels more trustworthy as a reference.

Too often when we go looking for interviews with people whose work we admire, we find that they either don't exist, were done a very long time ago, or don't focus on the aspects of their work that we want to know about. This frustration has led us to conduct our own interviews where we get to choose the focus and ask the questions.

Frequently, when people conduct interviews, they have to be severely edited to fit within the confines of a book or magazine. While it's not any fun to try to follow the transcript of a rambling, fragmented conversation, sometimes too much nuance, detail and personality gets lost in the editorial condensation process.

Temporary Conversations is a series where each booklet will focus on a single interviewee or subject. The booklets can be as long as they need to be. For us they will be an opportunity to connect with and spread the ideas of creative people of multiple generations. Some will be people we have a long history with. Others will be folks that we've never met, feel rather in awe of, and needed to work up the nerve to contact for the first time. We'd also be happy to see others conduct interviews that we publish but do not participate in so if you have ideas for someone you'd like to have a temporary conversation with, please contact us.

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