
ART 1

Red76

NO ONE

TOUCHES ME.

I AM INVISIBLE.

ACTIV

ISTS



Please destroy this book. Let it free into the world.

In the summer of 2006, while teaching in New York City at The Kitchen, I met Aaron Hughes: an artist, student, and recently returning soldier. Only months previously he had been discharged from the army. Since our first meeting, and his return home to the states from Iraq, Aaron has set about to creatively interpret his service in the army, his time in the field, and to utilize his skills as a creative force to do his part to help end the war in Iraq. One of the outlets that Aaron has available to assist him in achieving this goal is the anti-war organization Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW), of which he is the president of the organizations Great Lakes chapter.

In the fall of 2007 Aaron and I discussed the idea of Red76 and the Great Lakes chapter of the IVAW collaborating with one another on a project to combat the army's recruitment efforts. Aaron brought up a simple plan that he had considered, and we both decided that it was the right step to take; an open source initiative that anyone could take part in, assist in helping to spread the word about, and contribute their energies to in their own way. This project, entitled Befriend a Recruiter, is incredibly simple, and we urge you to join in. Here's how: get in touch with a recruiter. Tell them you are interested in joining the army and that you would like to learn more. Sign nothing. Keep talking for as long as you can bare it.

Beginning with this simple exercise, we all can do our part in counteracting the efforts of the military to enlist more bodies into the fight in Iraq. Our individual actions, accumulated across the country, can create a discernable difference. The more time that we collectively take from recruiters, the less time they have to effectively recruit.

It's these thoughts and activities – this conversation between artists and activists, soldiers and citizens – that have weighed heavily on our mind in relation to the publication of this booklet. So, consider this booklet in front of you as two fold in nature. The following texts concern citizen's relationship to the current war, former soldiers thoughts about their time in the military, and recently returning soldiers thoughts concerning their return home to the states. It is a snippet of a compendium of thoughts we have collected, and are interested in collecting more of, that is interested in asking the American public to consider what levels of agency the average citizen has today, what the nature of contemporary protest is, and how is the war affecting us, as soldiers, and as citizens alike.

As a means of activating these texts we have come back to the idea of the Befriend a Recruiter initiative. Accompanying each of these texts are mini-posters, if you will. Each of them in general anti-war in nature, each of them, in specific, promoting the IVAW, and/or the Befriend a Recruiter initiative.

So, Dear Reader, here is your task; read this booklet, and then tear it apart. Each of the images within this booklet can, in and of itself, serve as a means to promote the IVAW and the Befriend a Recruiter initiative. Use them as posters. Place them around your own town: on lampposts, under windshield wipers, in between books in the bookstore, in the crevices of six-packs of beer at the supermarket. Photocopy them! Make more, more, more!!! Make your own! If you don't live in the US then scan them, and send the images to friends in the states while urging them to make more as well. With two thousand copies of the booklet in circulation alone, and five individual images within the booklet itself, that creates ten thousand posters able to inform the public of an extremely worthy – and exuberant! – anti-war organization, as well as a simple, practical, and most likely entertaining, vehicle for individual protest.

So, as we stated at the beginning of this introduction: Please destroy this book. Let it free into the world.

Thanks,
Sam Gould (of Red76)

Portland, Oregon USA/Cascadia
April 2008

We'd like to thank all of the contributors who shared their thoughts for this publication, as well as the artists who, along with us, constructed the posters within: Dan S. Wang, Zefrey Throwell, Aaron Hughes, and Gabriel Mindel-Saloman

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To read further excerpts from this series, as well as view more posters supporting the IVAW and Befriend a Recruiter, please visit www.red76.com or www.befriendarecruiter.org.

For more information about the IVAW please link to: www.ivaw.org

Following the Black Block: Pragmatic Depression, Action, and Aftermath

By Sam Gould

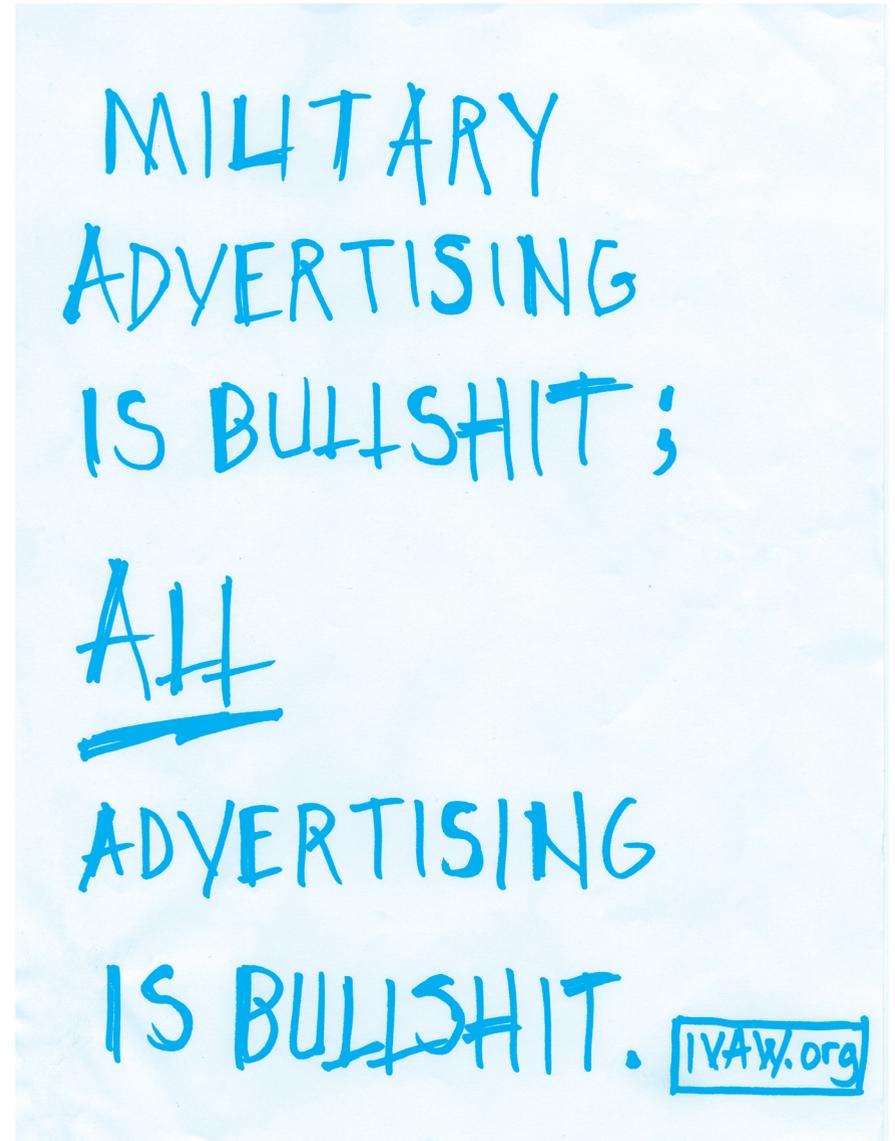
March, 2007
Portland, Oregon

Two days ago marked four years in Iraq. Demonstrations were planned for cities and towns countrywide. One week ago today I fucked up my foot pretty badly. Going up for a jumper against a friend during our weekly basketball game, I came down on top of his foot, my ankle rolled, and everyone on the court stopped as they heard a loud crack, and pop. I stumbled around, hoping it wasn't anything too serious. It isn't really, but I'm still limping around, and my foot it black and blue and yellow. As well, adding insult to my injury, I missed the shot. I haven't been able to exercise in way too long, and now I am feeling fat and lazy. In this mood, on Sunday, March 18th 2007, as people gathered in downtown Portland, and elsewhere around the country, to protest our unending, and unwitting, involvement in this war, I was slowly limping my way up Broadway with Laura, dragging my bad right foot behind me, on our way to the spot designated for the protesters to gather. As we passed Pioneer Square, across the street, a woman shouted non-stop to anyone who would listen. Angered by the thought of the protests set to occur that day, she shouted out as Laura and I passed her by, "My son is in Iraq! Don't bend over for the enemy!"

"Is this supposed to be "folk music?" I asked Laura as we arrived at the park. Outside our city's half-assed Art Museum a warmed over neo-folky sang a song about the troops: sons, daughters, mothers, and fathers. A fair amount of people were scattered around. We arrived at the park at the bottom of a rise, and I wasn't able to get a great take on the numbers in attendance. Four years and a few days earlier, uninjured, Laura and I walked the streets of Portland protesting the impending start of this war that we have become so complacent towards in the intervening years. We walked the streets with ten of thousands of others. The months leading up to that day, with regularity, people had taken to the streets, blocked traffic, bridges. I thought something might actually happen, that the sheer number of those in attendance might affect our governments approach, and diplomacy might prevail. A few days after those protests four years ago I stood in the Jockey Club, the bar attached to the first apartment I had lived in after moving to Portland in 1999 from Brooklyn, New York. Back then, Drinking a 75¢ can of Pabst, I saw helicopters hover over protesters blocking traffic on the Morrison Bridge, the Police beating them, and I began to realize that the years we had in store for us were going to be just as bad as I had imagined in the back of my mind. But, instead, they have been more than I could have imagined at the time, they have been worse, because I stopped seeing those images. No more people in the streets, no more helicopters circling over groups of concerned citizen's as they were pepper sprayed, wrists bound with zip-ties. Silenced. Nothing. No more action.

My foot beginning to ache a little, having to skirt around people, Laura and I wound our way through the crowd getting closer to the bandstand that had been erected for the gathering. We kept walking, trying to get a bead on the scope of the day's event, wanting to see how many people were there. "What are the numbers like?" Even as the thought went through my head, I couldn't help but consider, "but what does it matter how many people are here?" I wondered how many others thought the same, and stayed away. Or came anyway, quietly, secretly disheartened like I was. Earl Blumenauer – one of our Congressmen – spoke, as did our Mayor, the former Police Chief, Tom Potter. I was both pleased and confused by their presence, thinking maybe their being there was a sign that the tide was turning? From the stage Potter said, "in the late 1960's, during Vietnam, I lived in Portland, and I stayed silent. Today, I say to you, I will stay silent no more." The local president of the ALF-CIO got up on the bandstand and spoke out against the war. All well and good, but Blumenauer had voted against the war every chance he could, and Potter, very early on, voiced his complaints against the FBI and their hubris under the Patriot Act concerning the agency's work in Portland. Were these the figureheads taking risks we really needed? What risks were they taking, as they had already shown their spark? The march slowly began, and it was near silent. I said to Laura, "where is everyone our age?" The crowd around us all looked either older, or much younger, college-aged kids. As we crept along, the energy, the possibilities inherent in the day, slowly but surely dissipated. So many present, quite literally, kept silent. In a little over forty minutes we had circled back around on our prescribed route worked out between the marches organizers and the city. We ran into Gabriel, and Laura took off to get a few hours in at work.

Gabriel had just gotten off work, and immediately biked across the Burnside Bridge to the march. I saw him up the road as we approached him, leaning on his bicycle, taking it all in. He seemed a little dazed as he stared out at the



people slowly passing by. Leaving Laura to walk to her office, Gabriel and I followed the rest of the marchers back up to the park, and took a seat and began to talk about the day. I voiced my uneasiness about the proceedings. "What were marches good for?" I asked. An antiquated system that worked in the past, yet only in great numbers. And, numbers alone are a questionable factor in those histories. What good does it do with an administration that openly comes out and says that public opinion means nothing to them and their "resolve"? Those were Bush's sentiments after the marches in the days before the war began. What would their reaction be now? Still – even still – I couldn't help but think it mattered, no matter how seemingly futile. Getting up to keep looking around we walked down Park Ave. south towards Burnside. We watched the various groups mingling around; men on stilts dressed in spandex and sparkles, elderly women in sweatshirts emblazoned with doves, earnest college kids in baseball caps, sporting school colors. We weaved our way through the crowds, sidewalk to street, and back again. We passed a group of red and black anarchist kids trying to form a counter march. Standing on the street corner, one kid shouted, in repetition, "Whose streets!? Our streets!" The designated flag bearer waved around the black canvas, large and dense, fastened to a thick and sturdy stick. Suddenly a scream came out from the crowd of Black Blockers. "It's happening down there! Now!" They rush down the street, and I can't help for an instant but to admire their zeal as I see (and hear!) the large black cloth of their flag snap and crack as it follows them, whipping through the wind down the street.

Gabriel and I briskly follow. Arriving to find a phalanx of bike cops, dressed in yellow and black, attempting to corral the red and black faction of anarchist kids. The cops throw their bikes down on the street and attempt to form a velopedel barricade between the various factions gathering on all sides. An officer blasts a healthy dose of pepper spray point blank into the face of a man yelling at him. The shouts of, "Tell me what a police state look like!? This is what a police state looks like!" rise above all the shouting. An anarchist biker with a trailer equipped with speakers provides a backbeat to the proceedings. As I see the riot cops lining up down the road – black helmets, Kevlar heal to scalp, big black clubs, and menacing looking automatic rifles – the bike cops reconnoiter, and circle around the protesters on all sides of them, waiting for back up. The mounted police arrive. The horses clumsily attempt to hop over the tires of the bike cops. Dressed in a striped sweater, a collared shirt, khaki pants, and a winter hat, I situated myself in the middle of the street. Horses, bicycles, and the police move about me; the bike cops, now, using their bicycles as battering rams, pushing the bystanders to the sidewalk. No one touches me. I am invisible. As other protesters - ten, twenty feet away, in various directions - are pushed, pulled, and pepper-sprayed, I stand and watch. Nothing happens to me, camouflaged, I throw down my middle class colors in a haze of normality in bright contrast to the scuffle. As the riot cops begin to circle, and I find myself surrounded by them on all sides, I decided it best to quit the street for the sidewalk. Standing there, behind a police line of yellow bike shorts and bicycles, I can't help but resurrect the same feelings that I felt up the street. What's the point of this confrontation? I am elated by the energy, and action, but the misguided sense of purpose makes me think it is all for not. No matter how full of life – a life so often missing in the last few years - what is to be achieved here? A girl in nothing but baggy cotton men's underwear, with electrical tape over her nipples repeats the rallying cry, as she sits atop someone's shoulders, "Tell me what a police state look like!? This is what a police state looks like!" I want to be here, present and available. I want to be part of the living, and this carries all the outer hallmarks of life with its shouting, hustle, selflessness, and spirit: but what for? Where to? Soon, bored and not wanting to admit it, Gabriel and I walk around to try and find better outlets for a look into the action. After a while we walk over to Pioneer Square. I look for the woman from earlier whose son is in Iraq, but she's nowhere to be found.

I can't shake the feeling of uselessness, the day blanketing me in: the uselessness in old forms, and the overarching fear in not following them. What is *our moment* right now? I cannot tell if I am moving forward or backward. So often I do not feel discernable movement at all, though I am moving as much as I think I can. Where does the energy go? So much energy is exerted, nationwide, yet each day it seems to begin anew, its battery busted and uncharged. As Allen Ginsberg wrote, "America, I have given you my all and now I am nothing." But I know that this cannot be the case. Am I correct America? I agree with the college kids, and the elderly grandmothers sporting the dove sweatshirts. I am in solidarity with the man in the sparkles and spandex, towering over me ten feet tall in his stilts. I envy the energy generated by the black flag as it flutters down the avenue at a quick clip. But still, we are not united, even when we are in agreement. We are a nation steeped in dark nothingness: in oppression overlooked, in corporate slaughters, and grandfather clause racism. That is until we turn that nothing inside out, recognizing that we, ourselves, and our country alike, are here for this world, and not the next. I'm certain this is possible. This cyclical energy has recirculated through generations again and again. We have it in us. We just need to unleash our unconscious energies in collective exuberance.

We dress as Indians and commit acts of beatific treason, throwing our tea overboard, as often as we put on sheets to hide our acts of hideous violence. We rise up against child labor, we rise up against war, we rise up against police violence, and fixed elections, we rise up against mistreatment of our veterans, we rise up against the murder of innocents, we rise up, again and again, against racism and bigotry. We place flowers in the guns of our own soldiers, and make the Pentagon levitate off its foundation. When the occasion calls for it we *refuse* to rise up. We sit and



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COULD END
THIS WAR!

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continue to ask for a meal, for service. We go limp as they drag us out the door to be booked. Though we are sometimes slow to act, we listen and respond, with vigor. We have, time and again, acted. But the waiting! I am so impatient. I cannot wait any longer, and I am so confused. For seven years each day has stretched, and I feel so complicate within this game, as our government pushes us further towards the edge. Each day I wonder if I am looking the other way. Do you feel this way too America? Do you worry that you, too, are a secret killer in the night, sleepwalking through history? Or are we awake, but afraid to act? Gagged by economics, by race, by religion and sex, are we afraid to be friendless at home, at the expense of being the foe of many abroad? I want to harness the energy of the Black Block, and hear the snap of the flag, as I stand by the side of dove sweated grandmothers as they dance in the streets with the girls in the red and the black. I want to live in an America once again "suddenly" born into the realization that all informed action is protest. That protest equals positivity and progression, not regression. I desire protest partying, protest shopping, protest eating, protest fucking, protest walking, building, driving, lifting, stretching, pulling, reading, listening, watching, documenting. I want it! I am selfish for action, and energy. I am selfish for progress. I want to move, and America, I know you know how to dance. You've danced so beautifully in the past. You have the moves. We are not a nation of wallflowers. Come out of your shell America, I want to dance with you.

On Serving in the Army During "Peacetime"

By Mikey Merrill

My actual recruitment into the Army is a little anti-climatic. I knew what I wanted, and I approached the recruiter. Initially I talked to a Marine recruiter who kept trying to talk me into an ultra-elite badass program where I'd get to shoot people in the face. He was really intimidating and didn't ever listen to what I said, so I stopped talking to him and stopped answering the phone when he called. Then I talked to this Army recruiter who was very bookish and nerdy and didn't try to push anything on me. I told him what I wanted, and he handed me the paperwork.

The problem actually came later. I had this whole plan that I had created: Join the Army as an MP, then get out and go to college, and then join some federal law enforcement agency and eventually I'd be like Tommy Lee Jones in *The Fugitive*. Primarily inspired by my Dad who was a State Trooper and also by television and movies I thought I wanted to be a cop. I slowly learned that the people who chose law enforcement as a profession were not the people I wanted to be around. The thing about the Army is, of course, that you never get to quit. Having been guaranteed the MOS of 95B (MOS is Military Occupational Speciality, AKA "job" and 95B is Military Police) I had signed up for a five-year stint.

The unfairness of this system still pisses me off. I was 17 and I was choosing my job for the next five years? What person at 17 knows anything about the next five years of their life? You shouldn't be able to enlist until at *least* 21. And the idea of not being able to quit seems like such a giant pile of ludicrous bullshit now. That should have been a warning that I was being tricked.

And of course this was all during peacetime. I can't imagine the lies and tricks they are telling people now. Here are a couple of things to remember:

1. There is no reason to join the Military. I grew up in a small town in Alaska and I wanted to get out of the state and be my own person. The military cripples you and makes you dependent on them. You are better off driving to a big city and getting a job for minimum wage. You'll learn more and be around better people.
2. If you do join, you'll learn very quickly what things are like (hint: shitty!). Military life isn't that different from boot camp, there is just more alcohol around. There is a period, I can't remember how long, where if you quit boot camp it's like you were never enlisted. So if you are in, quit!
3. Better to be in control of a shitty situation than not in control of a slightly less shitty one. When I got out of the Army I worked for minimum wage at a fly-by-night security company and that was so much better than being enlisted. The only job I ever had that was worse than being in the Army was a short stint on the midnight shift at a sketchy convenience store. And so I quit that job!
4. A lot of the people I met in the Army were there because they felt they had to be. Some were trying to escape bad situations, some had family obligations of military service, and some were just using it to run away. Rarely did I



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meet anyone that actually *wanted* to be enlisted. And when I did, they were pretty disappointed with what the Army was actually like.

5. If you really want to be in the military, go to college and enter as an officer. Not only will this put you a lot higher up the food chain, but I bet after four years of college you'll have a lot of better things to do. And do the reserves or National Guard, you can always choose to go full time, but you can never choose to go part time.
6. You have the internet at your disposal! Look at all the people who say "Yay, the military is great!" vs. the amount of people saying "Boo! Terrible idea." Clearly there is something to this whole "The Military Is Not What You Think" thing. They put so much effort into recruitment, but they do the bare minimum of upholding their end of the bargain (The whole Walter Reed scandal, the college money joke, etc).

I could probably go on for a long time and even delve into some personal stories to highlight the comically tragic idiocy of my time in the Army, but the point is that I was very lucky and I should have listened to my friends. The military is a lie. It's nothing like what they are promising you, and they will never let you out. It's a terrible environment that will literally brainwash you and it takes a long time to recover.

Aaron Hughes: Discussing his recruitment into the army during an IAWA visit to Franklin's VDC in Columbus, Ohio (February, 2008)

Aaron Hughes: I was going to graduated from high school in 2000, and I didn't really know what I was going to do with myself. My best friend at the time was convinced he was going to be an army ranger. We would always go rock climbing, camping, and hiking, just different stuff together, and so I thought, "this could be a cool thing. Maybe I could sign up with you?" There was this deal wherein if you signed up with someone else you'd both get an extra bonus. It's like bring in your buddy and you get more money, and a promotion right away. I thought, "This is cool. Maybe I can do that?" I didn't even think of it, which is funny, but around the time of my last few drills, right before I got out in 2006, they'd started up a program in the National Guard, wherein if you find someone and bring them in - all you have to do is get their name to them so the recruiter can get in touch with them - you get two thousand dollars. Every time you get a new recruit to them. So now you have hundreds, thousands of active duty, and National Guard soldiers who are talking to their friends or their family members, they just want, well it's not like they're telling them they should sign up because it's a really good thing, it's because they can get two thousand dollars.

So I went down to the army recruiting station in Skokie and the recruiter was like, "This is great I'm glad you're here. Let me get your Social Security card, let me fill this paperwork out, we'll get you signed up, take you down to MEP's (Military Entrance Processing), we'll get you taken care of." And I was like, "wait, I want to see some of the paperwork. I wanna read through some of the stuff, and know what I'm getting into." And he was like, "Oh, you don't need any of that stuff."

"Well, what about college? I heard those advertisements where you get to go to school for free after you're done."

"Well, what we have is the GI Bill. It works differently."

And I said, "Well, that National Guard offers this, right?"

"The National Guard? No, you're talking about the reserves."

"No, it was the National Guard."

And he's like, "No, what you're talking about it the Reserves, the Army Reserves. That's what you want to go into. You



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www.befriendarecruiter.org

want to go into this program, where you can get this type of support for school. But it's not a one hundred percent tuition waiver."

And I was like, "Man, I could have sworn that I heard a radio program that said I could go to school for free. One hundred percent tuition."

So I went home, and I left my Social Security card there, and he was gonna come and pick me up the next day and take me to MEP's. That night I heard a radio program that said something about the Army National Guard, and it mentioned something about being able to go to school for free. And I didn't know at that time that there was a difference between the Army National Guard, and the Army Reserve, and active duty. I didn't know there were different recruiters. I didn't know that they were different systems. So I actually had to call down state to find out who the National Guard recruiter was in my area.

I was pretty set. I wanted to join the military. For one, I wanted to get out of my Mother's house. My Mom worked two jobs growing up, and we didn't get along very well. I really appreciate all the work that she does now, reflecting back on it. But, I guess, being the only guy in the house, it was kind of just a struggle. I always played sports, and I was always into this idea of asserting your manhood, and I always saw my coaches as these fatherly figures. So I thought, "oh, the army will be really good." And my Father, who I saw every now and then, his Father was in the marines. And so I thought about how my Father always talked about how his Father was in the marines and how that was a respectful thing to do. So I thought, "this is what I can do. This is how I can gain some respect. This is how I can get out of my Mother's house. This is how I can go to college. This is how I can be independent. This is how I can stop listening to my parents." They'd still fight, say, if I needed money for schoolbooks. They'd fight over who had to pay for them. So, I was like, "fuck this shit." My sister was going to college at the time, and they were always arguing about who was paying, and helping her. Because my Mom didn't have any money, and my Dad didn't want to give up any money.

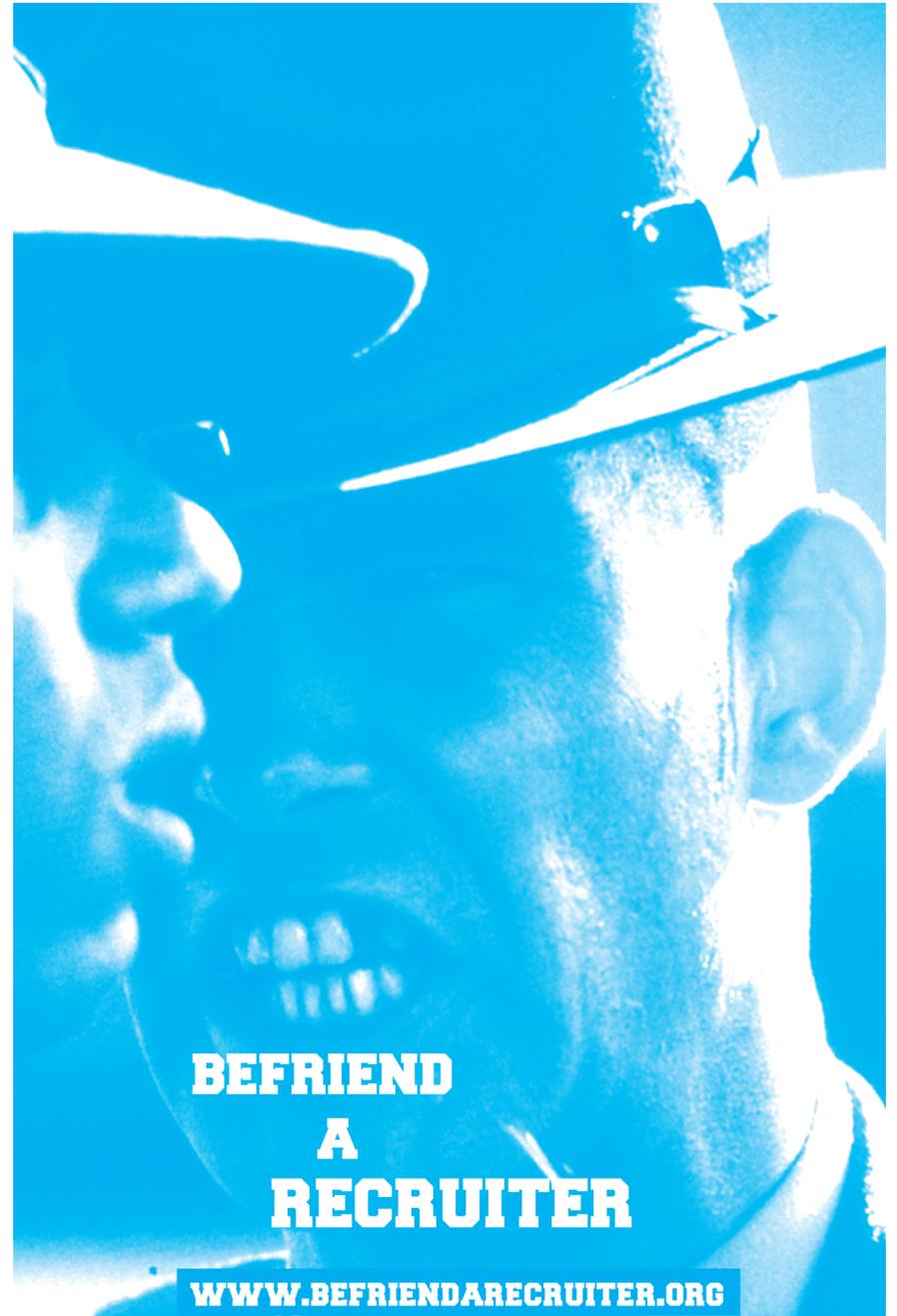
The next day the National Guard recruiter comes driving up in Camaro. A red Camaro. He picks me up and says, "Let's go to Burger King. What's up? What's going on?" It was like, "Yeah! Alright, let's go to Burger King!" I felt all guilty. I was like, "you're gonna buy me food? You have money to take me out to eat?" And he took me cruising in his Camaro. It was classic. I was seduced. I was asking him all about his car. I didn't even know anything about cars. I didn't even have... I had just gotten my drivers license, because we couldn't pay the insurance. So I thought, "man! This is exciting." So he took me down to the recruiting station, down to MEP's, and I took all the tests. And I got really high on my ABSEAB score – it's a standard test in the military that everyone takes – and I could have done anything in the military, anything at all. So he was like, "well, you can do anything, any sort of job. What do you want to do? We have over a hundred jobs."

"Well, I'm going to start school. I really wanna go to school. And if this is going to help me pay for school I really want that" – because I had applied to universities, but I didn't know if I was going to go because I didn't know if I could pay for it at the time. That's another reason why I decided not to go active, because I got into school, and I didn't know if I was going to be able to. And because I got in I was like, "man, this is an opportunity I really can't turn down, and I still really want to be able to pay for it." So I went and took my ABSEAB and he said that I could be anything, and I really didn't want to miss any school, so he said, "the shortest MOS's are cook, infantry, and truck driver." So I was like, well, "I don't really want to be in the infantry, and I don't want to be a cook. So I guess I'll be a truck driver. I like road trips. Yeah!" So I asked, "what do you do when you're a truck driver? What are your missions?"

"Well, you know, when the Mississippi flooded they took all the sandbags down."

And these were the types of conversations we were having, "Oh, so they were bringing the sandbags down, and helped to save those cities on the Mississippi River back in '93?" And I was told that they brought supplies and food to people in different places when they needed it, like when things like Katrina happened. And that's the type of stuff that I talked about with my recruiter, and I thought, "this is gonna be pretty cool. This is great! You get to stay in motels when you're out there." I don't even know why I thought any of this was true. I was a goof, I guess.

Anyway, so I signed up and I was pretty hardcore. I was ready to do anything. I was the most motivated private in my basic training class. I graduated from the top of my class. They have five soldiers who are considered at the top of the class. I remember at the end of basic training you get to do this spectacle for everyone's families. And my job, as the most motivated private, was to demonstrate the bayonet. And so you'd demonstrate all these different weapons for your family to show how motivated, how much of a killer you are, I guess. It was really odd. My Mother and Father came, and I remember running out into the sandpit, and there are all these people watching, and I'm yelling, "KILL!! KILL!! KILL!!" in front of everyone, and I remember that I was so proud of that. So proud that I knew how to do that,



and that I knew how to defend, and how to react. It was... I was hardcore about everything. And I really believed in this idea that the military could do good. That's what they tell you. You're building a future. They show you in advertisements, always, people helping other people, people climbing over an obstacle course, or a soldier helping another soldier. It's never the opposite. They never show you pointing your weapon at little kids, or shoving an old woman so she'll get out of the way of your truck, even though they're starving – you, know, “get the fuck back! You don't deserve any of the food on that truck.” Those aren't the type of things that they tell you.

Blood Makes The Grass Grow Green

By Aaron Montaigne

“This story has no moral/This story has no end/This story only goes to show/That there ain't no good in men.”

—From “Frankie and Johnny”
Tradition American Ballad

Here is wisdom that may offend, but I was never one for making friends. The first time I killed a man, I wore a grin long and wide. “Die motherfucker” I spat out loud. “You have killed friends of mine. Your war has come to an end today.” Have I changed? I don't know. And what have they done to my mind, my soul, my view of me and you? I don't know. Did their systematic “de-humanization” training sink into my thin colorful skin, or did I really enjoy “the triumphant death of the enemy?” You tell me. Sex, MTV, and feeding. Is the enemy me or is it so called “Hajji”?

Witnessing so much death and violence has made me understand: “All we are is Meat.” My indoctrination into experiencing human kind at its most carnal and animalistic began at day one. January 2nd 2003, I entered The United States Army Infantry training brigade at Fort Benning Georgia. “Blood makes the grass grow green” was the first thing I learned. “The sky is blue because God loves the Infantry” was the second. Ironic since my 3 year enlistment was supposed to be as an intelligence specialist, but somehow here I was training to become a ground pounder, a grunt, a bullet magnet, an Infantryman. As I soon discovered five months later as I was on a C-17 headed toward Babylon, home of the historic Euphrates, and Tigris rivers, I would become all of these things because the role of the Infantryman was to start shit, and I was a natural. Once after a particularly bloody day in exciting Iraq I sweetly asked my lieutenant “Why are there no girls in the Infantry?” The kind but nerdy officer replied sadly, “don't you know specialist? Girls die faster, and girls die louder, but boys can't help but cry.”

I experienced violence like no other in what was once the only civilized culture and society in the world (The Great Babylon). Iraq seemed any thing but civilized. Seeing people scared, injured, and dead was never a part of my “normal routine life” of rock and roll, art openings, pretty girls, and cool guy music scene. I somehow couldn't help feeling as if I was playing a bit part in some “epic war drama.” Except the pools of blood emitted an un-real order, the distant fires felt hot on my face, and the fear I witnessed was not acting. A one point the FOB (forward operating base) I was living on was demolished by a barrage of intense mortar fire. GI's died. A majority of our weapons, clothing, and ammunition went up in American flames. All I owned after that was the clothes, and gear I was wearing. It excited me.

Upon returning home to New York, I figured “that was that”. I would serve my sentence then be gone. Little did I know what the future had in store after all the terrible things I had witnessed up to that point had left no real impression on me. I considered my experience Lex Talionis (an occult term for Law of the Jungle), and that I had been schooled by the animals of the jungle themselves.

That next year us alcoholic boys of the 10th Mountain Division prepared ourselves for an experience that will leave an impression on me greater than any guilt or regret for placing myself in this fucking death trap mess I was in.

Mujahadeen!!

On the border of Pakistan, and Afghanistan in the sparsely vegetated mountains is where I found myself living for the next year and more. These “revolutionary” jihadist mountain Mujahadeen are tough as nails, and stupid as soap. These descendents - or just trying to re-live the success of the popular anti-soviet mujahadee - don't have the same support

as the “Muje” of old, but they sure had a lot of balls!

Me, and my not so merry gang of mountain men set up sandbags and rocks for cover of the sunrise and twilight battles to come. For this was our home for the next 15 months (irony once again, for our tour was only supposed to last 12 months. Do you see a re-occurring theme here? Lies.). This piece of Afghanistan was ours, this lonely plot of land on the side of this rugged mountain in the Pesch River Valley was to be our battle ground. The north side of the Pesch River belonged to NATO, the south belonged to them. By this time I had quickly risen to the rank of Sergeant, and was equipped with a “fire team” consisting of four young smart soldiers. One of the souls I was responsible for was armed with a Javelin portable missile system. The Javelin was awkward and heavy when having to carry up mountains, but often times when attacked by Mujahadeen or Taliban, the Javelin proved itself to be an effective weapons system. Designed for taking out tanks, we were instructed by our superiors to use it on any “identifiable targets,” meaning individuals. Inhumane you ask? Maybe.

January 2nd 2006 came and went. My time in service was up, but alas there I was still fighting in Afghanistan. Thanks to Donny Rumsfeld I became another statistic, and victim of “stop-loss”.

Stop-loss is basically the US governments way of imposing a legal draft on military individuals whose obligation is up (but not according to the recruiters fine print I later learned). The stop loss holds any soldier for up to 8 years in the military without a choice. This is part of the “recruiting” process that was deceptive and incredibly fucked up. My unit was not prepared mentally, or physically in some cases for the mountains of Afghanistan. We figured we had been through Iraq without too many problems, so this should be cake, right? Wrong. We were not prepared for the daily, and sometimes multiple daily, small arms, rocket, rpg, and heavy machine gun attacks. We were not prepared for the high casualty counts our unit endured, and oh the lack of amenities. Showering once a month, calling, or emailing home only once a month. Real food very rarely, consecutive sleep very rarely. It is safe to say I never experienced so much desperation, and lack of moral in my life. Soldiers smoking hash on daily patrols, our ground superiors high on so much valium that they couldn't even stand, and witnessing the death, and injuries of so many of our friends was horrifying. After a while GI's in my unit started faking injuries to avoid the fear of heading into the dark mountains. I didn't want to die like my friends were, for it looked painful. Nobody was happy. We were all scared shitless for months.

I'm not going to drag you, the reader, into stories of firefights, and battle bragging, for there is plenty of that on the shelves, or on the net, but what I experienced in Afghanistan was very reminiscent of Vietnam. The death and despair but, Oh The ADRENALINE. The one thing that kept me in the game was the rush of Adrenaline in my scarred veins.

By the time the Department of the Army discharged me (honorably but conditionally), I had been stop-lossed for a year and a half. I had a year and a half of my life STOLEN from me. This is happening all across the ranks kids. The general motto in the US Army these days is “FUCK THIS SHIT”. You would understand after one day in desert boots. These wars have taken their toll on lives, and the mental stability of soldiers having to endure what I have. Did my experience affect me negatively? I would say my brain is a bit different now, or else I probably wouldn't sleep (or attempt to sleep) with a loaded pistol under my silk pillow. You are asking, “why did he participate in combat? Why did this guy raise his right hand in front of fifty five pointed stars, and thirteen horizontal stripes?” FOR I AM GEMINI, and become easily bored. I became bored of the nighttime. Cocaine socialism and razzmatazz bored me, as did rock and roll. Or maybe I was in search of an adventure, like some indie rock T.E. Lawrence. Whatever the reason I knew I wanted to find a moral in all of this drama of which most of us only see on the news back home. I wanted to find a deeper meaning in this human animal kingdom, and I was surprised to find one moral in the end. It is nothing. There is no moral, just human kind at its worst, doing what we do best. Creating pain and garmonbozia.

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