

## [U.S. Veterans 'Occupy' Washington](#)

Street theater action by 'Iraq Veterans Against the War'

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Keynote speaker Army Lieutenant Ehren Watada had just stepped up to the podium at the 2006 [Veterans for Peace](#) annual convention last August 13, when about two dozen of his fellow Iraq War veterans silently filed up to occupy the stage behind him in a spontaneous act of solidarity for his stand against the war, in effect saying, "We've got your back, Lieutenant".

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[Lt. Watada's](#) refusal to redeploy to Iraq, which made him the first commissioned officer to do so, has resulted in a highly publicized, as of yet unresolved [court martial](#) and led to family members becoming [full-time D.C. lobbyists on his behalf](#).

Watada stoically paused for a full minute before resuming his speech ([YouTube video](#)) as the crowd of nearly 1,000 military veterans from many wars stood to thunderously applaud again, just as they had when he was first introduced after dinner moments earlier on the final night of the conference, which was held in [Seattle](#) on the campus of the [University of Washington](#).

On Monday, March 19, 2007, in conjunction with other [protest events in Washington, D.C.](#), around the U.S., and in the rest of the world on the fourth anniversary of the Iraq invasion, many of the same members of "[Iraq Veterans Against the War](#)" "occupied" our nation's capital in an effort to illuminate what innocent civilians in Iraq experience daily during the occupation of their sovereign homeland by the military forces of the United States of America.

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IVAW board chair Garrett Reppenhagen, one of the organizers of the street theater project, was quoted on their website as saying, "We are calling Monday's action [Operation First Casualty](#) because we believe that truth was the first casualty of this war. Our aim is to show the American public the truth of the US occupation in Iraq."

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Reppenhagen further clarified the mission of IVAW by stating: "It is time for the American people to know the truth so they will act to bring the troops home now."

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Multiple actions were staged over the course of the day around D.C., with local activists volunteering to serve as civilians in authentic portrayals of what actually transpires between U.S. troops and Iraqi civilians.

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The tables were momentarily turned, however, when some IVAW members were briefly detained by Secret Service and Park Police, according to [Indymedia](#). The activists, shown below with Reppenhagen in the foreground, stood "at ease" while the security agencies decided how to deal with these unarmed, uniformed veterans who had been expressing themselves in accordance with the First Amendment constitutional rights that they had sworn an oath to ["support and defend"](#) upon their induction into military service.

When asked for permission to utilize these photos in conjunction with an article about their activities, Reppenhagen responded: "You can pimp the action all you like. That would be awesome."

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Permission to use these copywrited photographs was granted by Jeff Paterson of [Courage to Resist](#), an organization dedicated along with Lt. Watada, IVAW, VFP and [ImpeachforPeace.org](#) to supporting the troops who refuse to fight in a war they all denounce as illegal and immoral as stated on the IVAW website

"Iraq Veterans Against the War was founded in 2004 to give those who have served in the military since September 11, 2001 a way to come together and speak out against an unjust, illegal and unwinnable war. Today, IVAW is made up of close to 400 members in 42 states, Washington, D.C., Canada and serving in bases overseas.

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IVAW gives its members the opportunity not only to connect with other veterans and active duty soldiers but also to speak with one voice. As members of IVAW, they go to colleges, middle schools, high schools, churches, libraries, and to the media to give first-hand accounts of what is really happening in Iraq. As eyewitnesses and participants in the war on terror, they are viewed as credible sources that are able to explain why the war must end now."

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