

Vets swell Occupy ranks after injury

Former Marine hurt in protest

By Gary Strauss
USA TODAY

Spurred by an injury to one of their own, military veterans are mobilizing to increase their presence and profile in the Occupy Wall Street movement.

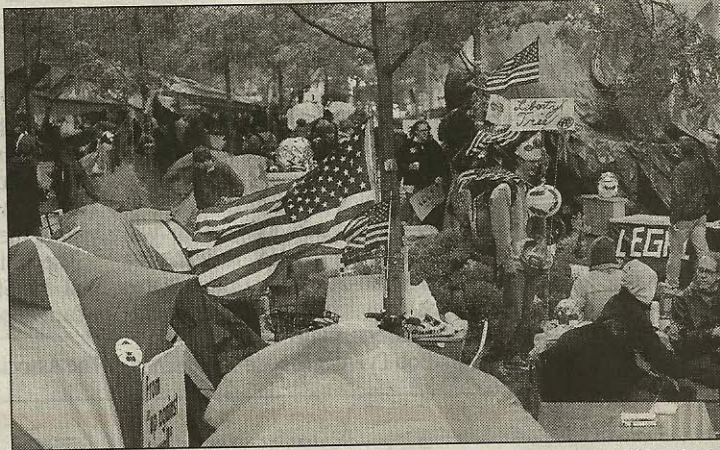
The New York City chapter of Iraq Veterans Against the War and dozens of other uniformed veterans known as "Veterans of the 99%" are expected to mass today near Wall Street, where Occupy began Sept. 17.

Although they've been participating in Occupy protests across the country, vets say their ranks have been swelling since last week, when former Marine and Iraq War vet Scott Olsen sustained a skull fracture when he was hit by a police projectile at an Occupy Oakland protest.

Olsen, 24, is still hospitalized but is expected to make a full recovery.

"His injury has definitely galvanized veterans," says University of Illinois senior Scott Kimball, who served in Iraq as an Army specialist. He'll be helping coordinate today's New York City event.

"We're getting calls from veterans



By Don Emmert, AP/Getty Images

In New York City: Occupy Wall Street protesters mill about an encampment Tuesday. More military veterans are joining the movement's ranks.

across the country who are extremely angry and appalled that someone who served two tours in Iraq got injured as a well-behaved protester," says Kimball, 27. "It's rallying vets across the country. We're just seeing the beginning of it."

Interim Oakland Police Chief Howard Jordan has said that the events leading up to Olsen's injury would be investigated.

Occupy Wall Street launched as a protest against corporate America's influence on government and the growing income disparity between

the nation's rich and poor. Although some of the protests have appeared aimless and disorganized, Occupy's central themes have attracted a widening band of followers, and the protests have spread to scores of U.S. cities and abroad.

The movement has been gathering support from labor unions and liberal groups such as MoveOn.org, but support from veterans has been less vocal. Occupy Marines, a Facebook support group that did not respond to calls, has been urging vets and active-duty personnel to show

up at demonstrations, but not in Marine uniform.

"I'm in it for the long term," says ex-Marine Shawn Riley, who served in Iraq and participates in Occupy Chicago. "This is an idea we're going to pass to future generations."

Joe Carter, a retired Army sergeant and head of the national Iraq Veterans Against the War association, expects increasing involvement from both retired and active-duty personnel. "We're hearing from 80-year-old former Marines," says Carter, who served two tours in Iraq. "Scott Olsen was willing to put himself on the line, so a lot more people are willing to take a more visible role."

Carter hopes vets can parlay higher visibility in Occupy protests into heightened awareness of issues important to them: high joblessness, declining benefits and lingering post-tour trauma.

Unemployment among 18- to-24-year-old veterans is more than 20%, vs. a national unemployment rate of about 9%, according to the Department of Labor.

Also today, Occupy Oakland is planning to disrupt the nation's fifth-busiest shipping port in a broad call-to-action that will include a march against local businesses.

Contributing: Judy Keen in Chicago