North Dakota Braves and the Atomic Bomb: Priest and Two Veterans in WMD Protest Prayer for Peace (Updated)

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North Dakota Braves and the Atomic Bomb: Priest and Two Veterans in WMD Protest Sentenced for Prayer for Peace (Updated)

By Bill Quigley

On August 6, 1945 the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Three days later, it dropped another atomic bomb on Nagasaki. These nuclear weapons killed over 200,000 people, almost all civilians, and injured many more.

On Tuesday morning, June 20, 2006, a Roman Catholic priest and two veterans were arrested at a nuclear missile silo in North Dakota. Fr. Carl Kabat, 72, Greg Boertje-Obed, 51, and Michael Walli, 57, sit in jail in North Dakota awaiting a federal criminal trial because of weapons of mass destruction and because of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Their crime? They tried to disarm one of the 1700+ nuclear weapons in North Dakota. On June 26, 2006, they went to the silo of a 40 ton Minuteman III first-strike nuclear missile and wrote on it "If you want peace, work for justice." Then they hammered on its lock and poured some of their own blood over it. They also spray painted "It's a sin to build a nuclear weapon" and hung banners on the fence.

The three dressed as clowns "to show that humor and laughter are key elements in the struggle to transform the structures of destruction and death. Clowns as court jesters were sometimes the only ones able to survive after speaking truth to power."

Greg Boertje-Obed, Carl Kabat, Mike Walli at E-9 missile silo in North Dakota.

A federal judge has cleared the way for the priest and two veterans to be tried before a federal jury on September 13, 2006 for damaging the Minuteman III. If convicted on the felony charges of criminal damage to property, each faces up to 10 years in federal prison and fines of up to $250,000.

Warheads launched from the Minuteman III missile silo can reach any destination within 6000 miles in 35 minutes. The nuclear bomb launched from a Minuteman silo carries 27 times the destructive power of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. It produces uncontrollable radiation, massive heat and a blast capable of vaporizing and leveling everything within a 50-mile radius. Outside the 50 square miles -- extending to hundreds of miles -- the blast, wide-spread heat, firestorms and neutron and gamma rays are intended to kill, severely wound and poison every living thing and cause long-term damage to the environment.

Minuteman III

Fr. Kabat has been a Catholic priest for over forty years. Greg Boertje-Obed was a First Lieutenant in the US Army. Mike Walli served two tours in Vietnam. All three men were born in small towns or rural areas of the Midwest. Walli and Boertje-Obed are members of the Loaves and Fishes Catholic Worker community in Duluth, Minnesota. Together they are called the "Weapons of Mass Destruction Here Plowshares." The Plowshares movement seeks to follow the instructions of Isaiah (2:4) and Micah (4:3) to "beat your swords into plowshares."

Lessons of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

At the time of their arrest, the three specifically linked their actions to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. "Two of the most terrible war crimes occurred on August 6th and 9th, 1945. On August 6th, 1945, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima, Japan, killing more than 100,000 people (including U.S. prisoners of war). Three days later the U.S. dropped an atomic bomb on the city of Nagasaki, Japan, killing more than 50,000 people. Use of these weapons of mass destruction on civilian populations were abominable crimes against humanity."

They went on to say "U.S. leaders speak about the dangers of other nations acquiring nuclear weapons, but they fail to act in accordance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty which commits the U.S. to take steps to disarm its weapons of mass destruction. We act in order to bring attention to people's responsibility for disarming weapons of state terrorism. We can begin the process of exposing U.S. weapons of mass destruction, naming them as abominations that cause desolation, and transforming them to objects that promote life."

Because the Minuteman III is a weapon of mass destruction, they argued, it is illegal under international law. "We are not criminals," Fr. Kabat told the court. "We are following the laws of morality. These weapons are the crimes against humanity!"

Mike Walli enlisted in the army as a young man. With the experience of two tours in Vietnam, he said, "This is not about our national defense. The hundreds of Minuteman III nuclear weapons are offensive weapons of mass destruction. Martin Luther King, Jr. preached that the United States is the chief purveyor of violence in the world. We must become a people-oriented society rather than a thing-oriented society. We must kick the war economy habit."

Greg Boertje-Obed, who, after his time as an officer in the military, married and is the father of an eleven year old daughter, told me "There is a sense of righteousness and harmony that comes from being in jail on August 6. When I was in the military, I was trained to fight and "win" a nuclear war. It became clear that all the preparations for a nuclear war were wrong. In contrast Jesus taught "Love your enemies…don't fear those who can kill the body… those who live by the sword will die by the sword." Now is the time to turn away from the ways of violence. Treat others the way we want to be treated. Now is the time to take steps to help the starving, ill, orphaned, weak, war-oppressed, and downtrodden all over the world. It is time to turn away from the bomb and the possibility of ending all life on our planet and to end the nuclear nightmare.

Fr. Carl Kabat spent several years in the Philippines and Brazil. "August 6th and August 9th are appropriate times to be in jail," he reflected. "We are here to witness against the

insanity of nuclear weapons. When these bombs were dropped on the Japanese I was too young to realize what had happened. Those bombings were war crimes that we, even today, do not acknowledge. The indiscriminate killing of children, women, old people and everyone else certainly cannot be accepted under any just theory of war. Perhaps the fact that we are in jail can help us as a nation remember the criminality of those days in the past. None of us can make up for the killings in the past, but there is a possibility that our being in jail during this time might help stop such insanity from being repeated in the future."

Entrance hatch to the silo used for maintenance. The peace activists used hammers to make the dial lock unusable.

North Dakota is home to more nuclear weapons than any other of the 50 states. The Bureau of Atomic Scientists estimated that the state contained more than 1700 nuclear warheads, not counting the ones planted in concrete silos in the ground.

In a statement, the defendants challenged the hypocrisy of U.S. nuclear weapons policy. "US leaders speak about the dangers of other nations acquiring nuclear weapons while our nation has thousands of horrific weapons of mass destruction. Our nation fails to act in accordance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty which commits the U.S. to take steps to disarm its weapons of mass destruction. We act in order to bring attention to people's responsibility for disarming weapons of state terrorism."

Refusing to dismiss the charges, the judge stated: "The laws of the United States do not support the theory that an individual has a right or responsibility to correct a perceived violation of international law or humanitarian law or tribal law or religious law by willfully destroying government property."

Francis Boyle, a professor of law at the University of Illinois, submitted a legal opinion to the court in support of dismissing the charges: "Where the 'property' allegedly damaged is part of an illegal and criminal threat of use of a weapon of mass destruction, these defendants acted lawfully and reasonably to prevent the most egregious and fundamentally prohibited of all crimes, war crimes."

Testimony from the Mayor of Hiroshima about the effects of nuclear weapons and the 1996 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice outlawing nuclear weapons were submitted to the court.

Blood-Pouring Anti-Nuke Clowns Sent to Prison: Weapons of Mass Destruction Protected

On November 15, the three men protesting the presence of weapons of mass destruction in North Dakota were sentenced to federal prison by a federal judge in Bismarck for their action the "Weapons of Mass Destruction Here Plowshares."

Dressed in faded black striped prison uniforms and blue cloth slippers, they appeared before the federal court for sentencing. Fr. Carl Kabat, 73, was sentenced to 15 months in prison. Greg Boetje-Obed, 52, was given a 12 month and one day prison sentence. Michael Walli, 58, received 8 months. All were ordered to pay $17,000

restitution.

During their trial, the men openly admitted trying to disarm the nuclear weapon. They pointed out to the jury that each one of these missiles was a devastating weapon of mass destruction, a killing machine precisely designed to murder hundreds of thousands. Testimony by experts about the illegality of these weapons of mass destruction under international law and their effects were excluded by the court and never heard by the jury.

Echo-9, the 40 ton Minuteman III site they damaged, lies deep in rural North Dakota about 100 miles north of Bismarck. Coiled beneath the surface of a bland concrete bunker, it is clearly visible from the gravel road. In fact, the otherwise pastoral countryside of farms and silos is full of nuclear weapon silos. One nuclear weapon launching site lies just across the road from a big farmhouse, another just down the road from a camp for teens. There are 150 other such nuclear launching facilities in North Dakota alone.

At the sentencing, Father Carl Kabat, who has already spent 16 years in prison for peace protests, spoke simply and directly to the court and prosecutor. "I believe that you, brother judge and brother prosecutor, know that the Minuteman III at E-9 is insane, immoral and illegal, but your actions protected that insanity, that immorality and that illegality. Brother judge, you could have possibly been a Rosa Parks, but your actions said "no." We all can openly and publicly condemn North Korea for nuclear bombs. We can openly and publicly condemn Iraq for nuclear weapons and go to war with them. We can openly and publicly condemn Iran for nuclear buildup, but we do not publicly condemn the United States for the same?"

Fr. Kabat then challenged all of us, "What is the use of post marking our mail with exhortations to "Pray for Peace" and then spending billions of dollars on atomic armed submarines, thermonuclear weapons and ballistic missiles?"

Michael Walli reaffirmed his continuing conviction of the illegality and immorality of these weapons. He pointed out that Irish Courts allowed juries to hear about international law. Recently, after learning that US jets were stopping at Shannon Airport to refuel on their way to bomb Iraq, the Pitstop Plowshares went onto the runway, poured their blood on it and started to take up the tarmac to prevent additional flights. After two mistrials, these peace protestors were acquitted on all counts earlier this year by an Irish jury who heard an expert on international law and other witnesses explain the illegality of the U.S. actions. To conclude his sentencing statement, the Peace Prayer of St. Francis was read into the record.

Greg Boetje-Obed appealed to the judge to consider the testimony of the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki about the horrific effects of a tiny nuclear weapon on their communities, testimony the court would not allow the jury to hear. He asked the judge to re-consider expert testimony from Professor Francis Boyle about the criminality of nuclear weapons under international law and the UN resolutions calling for nuclear disarmament, evidence also kept from the jury.

The judge challenged Greg Boertje-Obed's decision to take actions that risked imprisonment instead of staying home with his family. "Why would one leave a wife and daughter at home to engage in juvenile acts of vandalism to protest nuclear weapons? I would think your commitment to your family should far outweigh your calling to such actions." Greg's wife, Michelle Naar Obed, was in the courtroom during this exchange. After the sentencing was over, Michelle shook her head and said, "If Greg had left us his for a year and risked his life to go to war to kill people, no one would question him

– they would call him a hero! But, because he risked time in jail to act out his convictions for peace, people question his commitment to his family. That is tragic."

What does it say about our society that personal sacrifices to go to war to kill people in war are praised, while personal sacrifices for peace are condemned? What does it say that intentional destruction of cities and communities and families and individuals are considered totally legal, while actions trying to dismantle weapons of mass destruction send people to prison? Until those interested in peace are willing to make the same sacrifices as those interested in war, peace will not prevail. These three men have proven they are willing to pay the price for peace. Their courage and sacrifice challenges us all.

While these men serve their time in prison, one hundred fifty weapons of mass destruction sit peacefully free and protected in the fields of North Dakota. The law protects these weapons and finds those who try to protect the world from their holocaust criminals. If the weapons are ever used, the people of North Dakota will not need the news to tell them. The launch of these weapons will signal the failure of justice and the end of life as we know it.

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For the story of the trial and conviction of the three anti-nuclear protestors click here (http://www.jonahhouse.org/WMD%20Here%20Plowshares/Legal/TrialQuigley.htm).
For more information about the trial contact the Loaves and Fishes Community in Duluth at 218.728.0629 or Nukewatch at 715.472.4185. Further information about the case, pictures and updates from the men are posted on the Jonah House website (http://www.jonahhouse.org)

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