

Trident nuclear base: 122,400 Hiroshimas on demand

By Terry Glavin for CUP

On July 4, while most residents of the isolated village of Bangor in northwest Washington state quietly observed the anniversary of American independence, a small group of Canadian and American families crossed the perimeter of the nearby Trident nuclear submarine base.

Some climbed a fence into a thickly wooded area of the base while others landed in four small boats at a beach within the base perimeter. Twenty-eight demonstrators were arrested on federal trespass charges and 12 children were released to the custody of friends who waited at the main gate of the base.

During the five weeks that followed, a "summer of intensive resistance" to construction of the port facilities of the 30-vessel Trident nuclear submarine fleet developed into the most controversial political issue on the West Coast this summer.

Almost daily demonstrations at the base, involving small-scale civil disobedience, resulted in the arrest of 50 Canadians and Americans, most of them members of the Pacific Life Community, a pacifist group based in New Westminster, British Columbia.

The summer-long anti-Trident campaign culminated in a massive demonstration at the base August 14 which involved about 2,000 protesters from Canada, Australia and throughout the United States.

About 500 demonstrators, as an act of civil disobedience, crossed a white line that marks the perimeter of the base at the main gate but no arrests were made.

Jim Douglass, a spokesperson for the Pacific Life Community, said recently that the August 14 demonstration was "successful beyond our hopes and expectations. We've never had anything as spectacular as 2,000 people at a demonstration before."

Demonstrations at the Trident base in the past have been small and sporadic — but small-scale civil disobedience at the base has resulted in 181 arrests since 1975.

"This summer was a good beginning," Douglass said. "In particular, it showed the importance of maintaining a constant presence at the base, and the importance of coming together, the way people did on the 14th."

Local residents stood by in amazement August 14 as pacifists, environmentalists and students from B.C.'s Simon Fraser University choked Bangor's tree-lined streets.

The demonstration took on the atmosphere of a county fair as 2,500 multicoloured helium-filled balloons were released above Bangor and police deputies clapped along with anti-war songs and joked with demonstrators.

But the Pacific Life Community believes it can be stopped — through a "sustained presence" at the base, through a "combination of international pressures" and a greater involvement of Kitsap County residents, according to Douglass.

The Trident facility means jobs to the people of Kitsap County. The U.S. federal government is the main source of income in the county, because of the civilian workforce at

the Keyport Torpedo Station and the Bremerton shipyards.

Aside from the brush-picking industry, the second largest in the county, residents have little left to choose as a livelihood.

But to Robert C. Aldridge, the designer of the Trident missile, and to thousands of demonstrators who have made their way to Bangor during the past two years — Trident represents a first-strike weapons system.

Aldridge, who resigned his post with Lockheed Aerospace in protest against the nature of the Trident system, has said the Trident missile is designed to destroy "hard targets" such as Soviet underground missile silos — which, in the event of a nuclear attack, would be empty.

Aldridge believes Trident puts a "hair trigger" on American nuclear armaments and represents a deadly shift in nuclear "defence" policy.

The Trident system is composed of 30 mammoth submarines, each powered by two nuclear reactors, and equipped with 408 no-miss missiles, each allegedly 10 times as powerful as the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima in 1945.

Each Trident submarine, the first of which is scheduled to dock at Bangor in early 1979, is four stories high, the length of two football fields, and costs \$2 billion.

The Trident system is 30 submarines times 408 warheads times 10 Hiroshimas, and is the costliest and most destructive weapons system in the history of warfare.

The Pentagon claims Trident is essential to maintain a "balanced deterrence force" with that of the



Soviet Union. The Canadian government complies with the American government, and has refused to object to the passage of Trident submarines through the international waters of the Straits of Juan de Fuca.

But Canadian resentment to Trident's presence is growing. The Trident port facility is being constructed just 60 miles south of the U.S. - Canada border.

The Trident system has been condemned by such diverse voices as

the Catholic Archbishop of Vancouver, the B.C. Federation of Labour, the Greater Vancouver Real Estate Board, and, in a rare show of solidarity, the four provincial political parties.

But Kitsap County residents are becoming increasingly hostile to the almost continuous presence of demonstrators at the base.

In late July, local residents threw tire irons, rocks, and smokebombs from passing cars at a shanty constructed across the road from the

main gate of the base, in which a small group of Canadian protesters were sleeping.

In early August, a man who identified himself as a veteran of three wars attacked a Canadian PLC member who was maintaining a fast at the main gate of the base and strangled him until he was unconscious.

This fall, civil disobedience is expected to continue at the Trident base, and the PLC is currently looking for a large house near the base to serve as a "permanent base of operations."

The PLC will also be involved in a series of complex court trials this fall as demonstrators appear before federal judges and state magistrates on charges arising from civil disobedience at the Trident base.

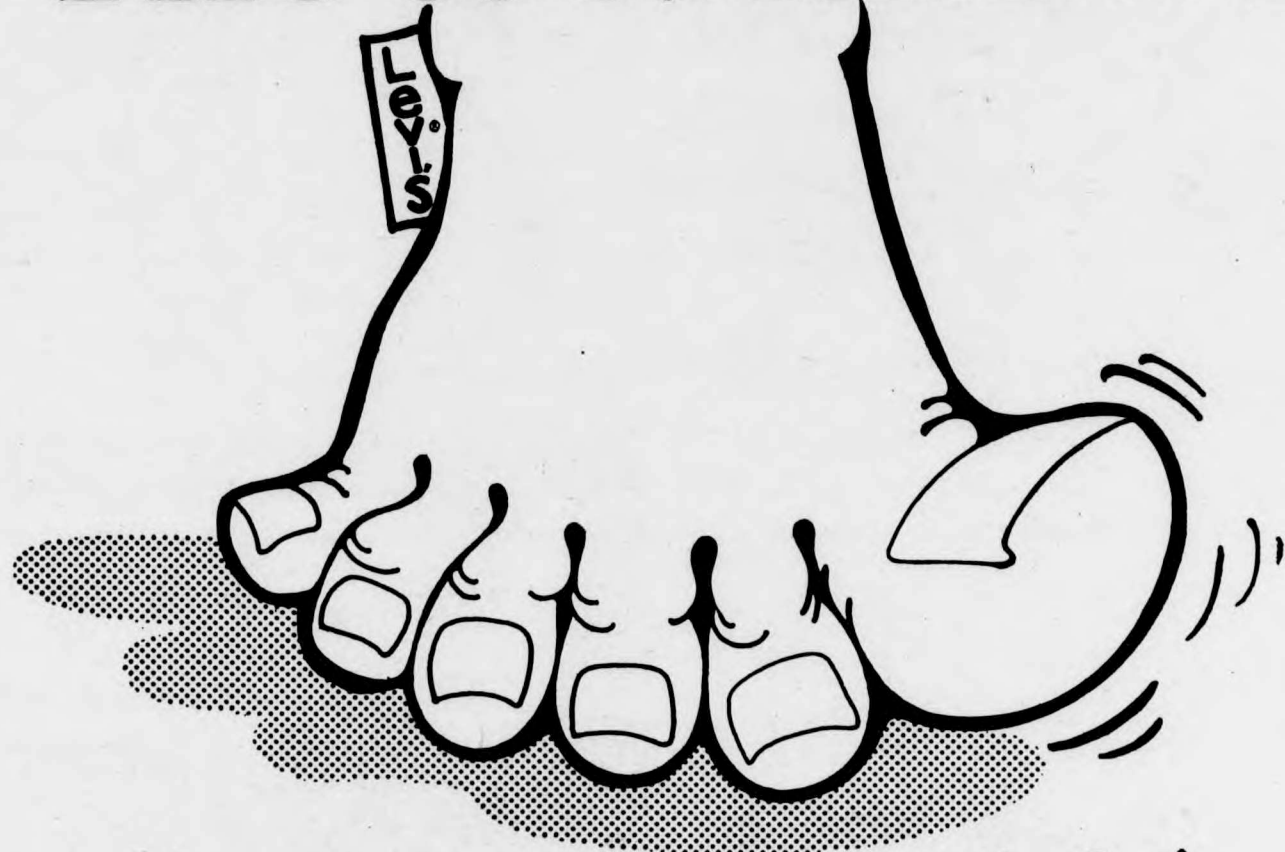
The American Civil Liberties Union, concerned that the arrest of people who distributed leaflets at the base violates free speech provisions of the American constitution, will play a major role in the trials.

Many PLC members have already served long jail terms for previous civil disobedience, and now vow not to back down in their attempt to test the legality of the Trident system under international law.

A common defence of the PLC in the past has been that Trident represents "active preparation for aggressive war" and violates several international statutes and declarations.

"We've seen that construction of the base can be virtually stopped," Douglass says. "Bangor Summer was a great step forward."

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