

Baltimore woman among Catholic peace activists facing charges after detention at submarine base

WASHINGTON - Elizabeth McAlister, a 78-year-old peace activist from Jonah House in Baltimore, was among seven Catholic peace activists detained at Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay in Georgia early April 5, hours after entering to protest nuclear weapons.

The group carried “hammers and baby bottles of their own blood,” which was spilled on at least three sites on the base, supporters said in a statement.

Identifying themselves as the Kings Bay Plowshares, the seven said in a statement posted on Facebook that they acted in response to the prophet Isaiah’s biblical call to “beat swords into plowshares” at the base, home to a fleet of Trident nuclear weapons-armed submarines.

The Navy’s fleet of Trident submarines carries about half of the U.S. active strategic nuclear warheads, according to military observers.

The activists said they chose the date of April 4 to undertake their action to mark the 50th anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and to “repent of the sin of white supremacy that oppresses and take the lives of people of color here in the United States and throughout the world.”

McAlister is a former nun and the widow of Philip Berrigan, a former Josephite priest assigned to St. Peter Claver in Baltimore who was best known for burning draft files in Catonsville in the late 1960s.

In addition to McAlister, those detained were Jesuit Father Steve Kelly, 69, of the Bay Area in California; and Catholic Workers Carmen Trotta, 55, of New York City; Clare Grady, 50, of Ithaca, New York; Martha Hennessy, 62, of New York, granddaughter of Catholic Worker co-founder Dorothy Day; Mark Colville, 55, of New Haven, Connecticut; and Patrick O’Neill, 61 of Garner, North Carolina.

Scott Bassett, public affairs officer at the base, confirmed to Catholic News Service that seven “unauthorized individuals were caught trespassing on the base” shortly after 1 a.m.

He said they were turned over to the Camden County, Georgia, law enforcement authorities and that they faced charges of trespassing and defacing federal government property.

“At no time were any military personnel or military assets threatened with their presence,” Bassett said.

Jessica Stewart, a supporter of the group and a Catholic Worker in Bath Harbor, Maine, told CNS the seven arrived at the base in southeast Georgia about 10:30 p.m., April 4 and entered shortly thereafter.

Bassett declined to say why it took base personnel more than two hours to find the activists, who had split into three groups.

Stewart said the group place crime scene tape and spilled blood at different locales on the base while posting an “indictment” charging the military with crimes against peace, citing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

A news release from supporters said McAlister, Kelly and Trotta were discovered at nuclear weapons storage bunkers; Grady and Hennessy were detained at the base administration building; and Colville and O’Neill were at monuments

commemorating the submarines.

George P. Matysek Jr. contributed to this story.

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