

NIS

Nuclear Information Service

2003 ANNUAL REPORT

FROM WAR TO LAW

Inevitably, the war against Iraq cast a shadow over the year. NIS's response was to put its experience to use, analysing and distributing information immediately on the build up and start of the war from USAF Fairford and at Welford, where bombs were delivered and stored pending onward transmission to Fairford.

As we watched on our TV screens the bombs falling on Baghdad which only hours before we had reported leaving Fairford, it was difficult not to feel a sense of futility. Our hope is that the more people feel personally connected to the processes of war, the more they will come to question war itself.

After the bombing war, we assisted the Peacerights Legal Inquiry into the War and at the end of the year, contributed to framing the Peacerights Legal Inquiry on Nuclear Weapons in 2004.

Throughout the year we reported on the proposed new developments at AWE Aldermaston - plans that could effectively become the infrastructure for a successor to Trident.

The first item of this package, a massive new weapons-testing laser facility, reached the planning notice stage (or rather, the MOD version, which can't be turned down), in the autumn. NIS was ready and waiting, and it is a testimony to the network of contacts that NIS has established over the years that hundreds of objections reached West Berkshire Council within the statutory time limit. Di McDonald represented objectors at the Planning Committee hearing (time allowed - 3 minutes).

Although we failed to persuade the Council to refuse to comment on the plan, Di delivered Counsel's Opinion to the committee, and this finally led to the MoD withdrawal of its notice under pressure to produce an Environmental Impact Assessment.

NIS is making increased use of specialist consultants. Ippy Dee, our IT consultant, has created and developed our 1,500 hits-a-week website and a list-serve group for people who want to receive our monthly NIS Aldermaston Update. Rachel Western completed her survey of potential links between environmental and nuclear issues campaigning groups - not just now was her conclusion: environmental NGOs are just too busy with their own urgent work.

NIS continues to work closely with NAG, which campaigns on radiation as an environmental issue. Solicitor Jamie Woolley, our legal consultant jointly funded by JCRT and INLAP, is working on the NIS project on Local Authorities with military sites in their areas. In the office we welcomed first Nancy McKeith and then Giulia Gigliotti as Administrative Assistant.

On behalf of NIS Board of Directors, and staff, I would like to thank all our benefactors for their support, particularly the JCRT for its continuing help, both financial and advisory.

Evelyn Parker, Chair of the Board of Directors

Reporting on the War on Iraq

When the American & British war on Iraq became politically inevitable, the gradual arrival of 14 USAF B-52 bombers at USAF Fairford in Gloucestershire was monitored by Fairford Peace Camp from 17th February 2003. NIS joined the effort to alert the world to the beginning of allied bombing of the Iraqi people from this wholly USAF operated airbase.



Fairford Peace Camp at Gate 10, USAF Fairford, Glos.

After a series of exercises, 18 hour sorties to Iraq began on 20th March. The following week, with air clearance over France and Germany agreed, flying time reduced to 14 hours. Refuelling tankers based at Lakenheath in Suffolk supported the flights that left Fairford round the clock every day for 33 days on 120 missions over Iraq with more than 2,700 bombs and cruise missiles according to the USAF.

As the bombing campaign reduced in intensity, B-52s returned to base with munitions still on board. On the first occasion on 4th April, the bomber overflew Fairford to the Bristol Channel where its ordnance was discharged. A confused Ministry of Defence denial stated that "An aircraft did return with what is believed was 'hung-up ordnance', which had not deployed properly. It is common sense that it may be safer not to land like that. There are areas around the coast where a plane can go to jettison ordnance such as this."

The MoD spokesperson continued, "it was then decided that landing would be safe. The bomb was not jettisoned and the plane returned to Fairford with it." In any event, B-52s did practice the risky landing with weapons hung under their low-slung wing until 24th April when the airbase ceased war operations and on 26th, the B-52s returned to the USA.

The presence of the Peace Camp and thousands of demonstrators against the war from Fairford attracted a heavy-handed stop & search regime against the camp from Gloucestershire police, supported by other UK forces. For the duration of the war, police

attempted to prevent Peace Campers returning to their tents with clean washing and shopping. New arrivals carrying sleeping bags and visitors bringing food and water were criminalised for walking along a country lane.

NIS provided a 24hour Legal Support Helpline and negotiated a more reasonable response with senior officers when possible. Solicitors were alerted and supporters kept informed. Legal support was also given to other groups and individuals during and after the war. A less stressful, but similar police harassment accompanied the protest in July when Fairford Peace Camp was established during the Fairford Air Tattoo.

Weapons of Mass Destruction Debate

In July, a debate on WMD in Reading Civic Centre was organised jointly by NIS and the Nuclear Awareness Group. Chaired by Rob Edwards from the New Scientist journal, the speakers captured the huge difference between nuclear and chemical/biological weapons. Rebecca Johnson, from the Acronym Institute, kindly replaced John Large who was called away to the IAEA in Vienna.

Questioned about proposals to develop a new nuclear weapon at AWE Aldermaston, Rebecca said that nuclear testing was the key element in the development programme. Andy Brookes from the International Institute for Strategic Studies said, that after the terrorist attacks of 11th September, the US government's policy to demonise certain countries was fundamentalist, and would not change "unless something goes badly wrong." For example, American voters will not support the current level of US soldier deaths in Iraq for long.

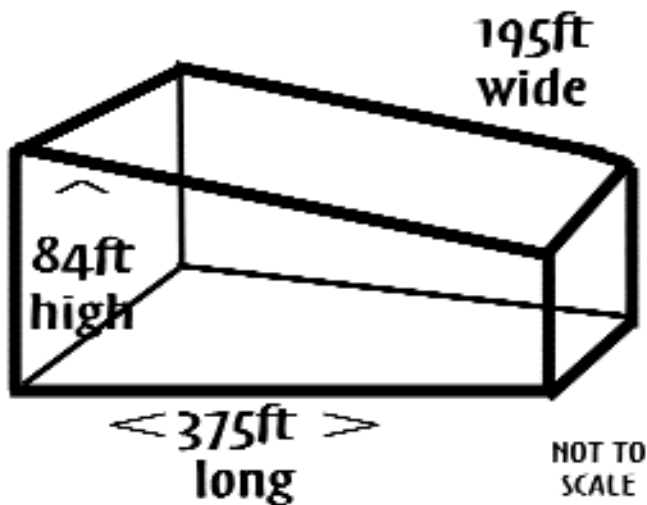
Both speakers agreed that much of American public opinion did not support war and warned against anti-Americanism.



Speakers and guests at the NIS/NAG WMD debate held in Reading, July 2003.

STRAND: Systematic Tracking of New Developments at AWE Aldermaston

in July 2002, AWE announced its plans to prepare for a possible government directive to research and develop a follow-on to Trident or a new nuclear weapon. Alarm bells rang as the impact of this huge investment by the MoD in the AWE site was felt round the world, particularly in the Peace, Security & Disarmament community here and in the USA. NIS was uniquely placed to monitor the actual progress of the plans on the ground and in the local community. We began by providing information to interest groups, NGOs & the media through a regular Update on AWE.



The proposed Laser facility at AWE Aldermaston would dominate the site near the A340; with 5ft thick walls, it would be a large windowless wedge.

In October 2003, the MoD submitted an outline planning notice to West Berks. District Council (WBDC) for a new Laser facility, a 1000 times more powerful than the existing HELEN laser on site. We quickly circulated the plan and details of how to lodge objections although public notices did not appear until November.

Confusion reigned as WBDC gave out various different closing dates for objection, eating into the 21 days allowed for comment and for our legal advisers to get Council's Opinion. NIS Director, Di McDonald examined & copied the Application file, requesting that objections received in advance of the application date were added to the file.

On 17th December, despite 200 objections, 3 petitions, an MP's letter and Council's Opinion that an Environmental Impact Assessment should have been done, the Council raised no objection but promised to send the file of objections to the MoD, then withdrew the application.

Nuclear Transport

Our regular commitment to analyse Nukewatch data demonstrated a slower rate of Trident warhead servicing at AWE than in previous years.

Four convoys delivered warheads to Coulport from AWE Burghfield in 2003. The prior number of SNM convoys into Burghfield suggests that on average, only two warheads were transported to Scotland in each loaded convoy, making a total of 8 warheads delivered as operational after service. In each of 5 convoys bringing warheads back to AWE for servicing or replacement, there could be up to 4-6 warheads, making around 25 returned to AWE.

Nuclear Submarines

NIS has continued to co-ordinate the national Nuclear Submarine Forum (NSubF) responding to the MoD ISOLUS Project to safely prepare and store redundant submarines. NSubF meetings for groups living around possible storage sites have been held in Edinburgh and London. In December, a critical but constructive submission to the Consultation was agreed, stressing safety above industry's preference for cutting up the submarine reactor compartments.

Legal Matters

NIS has established a new legal project called SLALAM, to Study Law Associated with Local Authorities & the Military. We have been fortunate in appointing Jamie Woolley, Solicitor to the Nuclear Free Local Authorities as a part-time researcher. The two authorities he has looked at this year have been Southampton City Council, in relation to the proposed berthing of nuclear submarines in the docks and WBDC over the proposed AWE Site Development Plan.

Logistics support was given to the Peacerights' Legal Inquiry Into the War on Iraq held at the LSE on 8/9 November. Di continued to serve on the Board of Peacerights, and will provide evidence for its 2004 Legal Inquiry on Nuclear Weapons.

IT Focus 2003

Regular updates of the website content, added functionality and discreet redesigns have all played a part in improving the usability of the site. This has been reflected in the trend of increased visits to the NIS website since April 2003.

Over the summer exiting lists for distributing NIS Updates were consolidated into one single listserve provided by riseup.net. The consolidation has enabled a simpler means of disseminating information and, we are pleased to report, the number of subscriptions to this service has steadily increased since its inception.

Environmental Links Research Project

There are obvious links between nuclear environmental threats and nuclear disarmament, but NGOs and local campaigning groups tend to keep the subjects apart. NIS commissioned Dr. Rachel Western to identify and explore the areas where groups might cooperate. Disappointingly, the evidence showed that environmental NGOs had a full programme of urgent work and that joint strategies were not possible at the moment

Meetings, Presentations & Training

Throughout the year NIS arranged speakers for six events. Di attended the Nuclear Issues Working Group, seven training seminars, the public consultation on the new Nuclear Decommissioning Authority and civic celebrations for United Nations Day in Southampton. At this year's British Environment and Media Award ceremony, Di received the Andrew Lees Memorial Award from Christopher Ward, Chair of the World Wildlife Fund. TV presenter Alistair McGowan announced her as the winner for "her honest, polite, persistent and determined approach to nuclear issues".



Di receiving the Andrew Lees Memorial Award.

Support for Groups

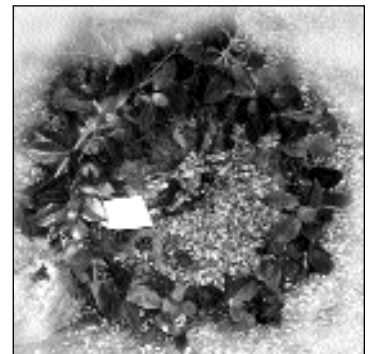
NIS continued to provide office support for voluntary groups such as Solent Coalition Against Nuclear Ships (SCANS), NsubF, NAG, Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp(aign) and Winchester Walk, the southern feeder march of the 2004 London to Aldermaston March.

Staff Changes during 2003

During the year we were glad of administrative support from volunteer David Curl and Nancy MacKeith – our Administrative Assistant, prior to her appointment in Sierra Leone. In October, we welcomed Giulia Gigliotto to the appointment of Administrative Assistant.

In Memoriam

Wreath prepared by NIS in memory of Rachel Corrie, ISM volunteer killed by an Israeli military bulldozer on 16 March 2003 as she attempted to prevent the demolition of a Palestinian home. The wreath was placed on the fence at USAF Fairford on 22 March 2003 during a demonstration against the bombing of Iraq.



Acronyms

AWE	Atomic Weapons Establishment
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Authority
ISOLUS	Interim Storage of Laid Up Submarines
JDAM	Joint Defence Air Munitions
LSE	London School of Economics
MoD	Ministry of Defence
NAG	Nuclear Awareness [group]
NDA	Nuclear Decommissioning Authority
NsubF	Nuclear Submarine Forum
USAF	United States Air Force
WBDC	West Berkshire District Council
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

Financial Report

	Income	Expenditure
2002	£38,474	£32,719
2003	£41,405	£39,047

The NIS team is very grateful to the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT) that continues to fund our charitable work and offer support and training through other organisations. This year we were also grateful to the Polden-Puckham Charitable Foundation and INLAP for grants towards our disarmament and legal projects.

Nuclear Information Service

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