

“Closed For War Crime Inspections”

By John LaForge

BÜCHEL, Germany — A group of citizen inspectors demanded but were refused entrance to the German Air Force base here Sept. 1. The base is suspected of storing up to ten U.S. Air Force nuclear bombs, which are to be loaded onto German Tornado jet aircraft in the event of nuclear war.

When the self-appointed inspectors were denied “free and unfettered access” to investigate the area for signs of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) — as the U.S. and UK demand of a select number of countries suspected of having nuclear weapons — the group began a peaceful blockade of the three main base entrances.

The blockaders held a large banner, “Hey Blix, They’re Here!” referring to UN weapons inspector Hans Blix who failed to find WMD in Iraq prior to the U.S. attack that began last March.

No arrests were made, most likely because of the involvement of dozens of internationals and because of the military’s wish to avoid bringing attention to the alleged presence of

Sellafield Nuclear Dream Dashed

SELLAFIELD, England — *The Guardian* reported on Aug. 26 that Sellafield’s Thorp reprocessing operation, a \$1.8 billion project owned and operated by British Nuclear Fuels (BNFL) that opened only nine years ago, is to close by 2010. Thorp, an acronym for thermal oxide reprocessing plant, reprocesses spent fuel to produce plutonium and uranium for potential reuse. It was once hailed as the savior of the British nuclear industry with its promise of producing limitless electricity throughout the 21st century.

Brian Watson, director of the Sellafield site, told the newspaper, “There is £30 billion (US \$19 billion) worth of clean-up work here. We are switching from reprocessing to clean-up. We hope that will be seen in a more positive light.”

British Nuclear Fuels denied that any closure announcement had been made, although they acknowledged a shift in focus. A statement said, “Thorp has an order book which currently extends to 2010. Although the focus of the Sellafield site is shifting from commercial reprocessing to clean up and managing the historic legacy, BNFL has made it clear that all existing reprocessing contracts will be honoured.

“Any new business for Thorp will depend upon the wishes of our customers, the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority which will assume ownership of the site in 2005 and ultimately the sanction of government.”

BNFL is being changed from the owner of Sellafield into a management company since it became technically bankrupt two years ago with liabilities now estimated at £41 billion (US \$26 billion). The government is creating a Nuclear Decommissioning Authority to take over the assets and liabilities.

There are 75 tons of plutonium and 3,336 tons of uranium recovered from the reprocessing with no obvious use. The plant is being run at 50% capacity because the dangerous liquid waste produced by reprocessing cannot be disposed of fast enough to satisfy safety regulators.

—*The Guardian*, Aug. 26, 2003; *BBC News*, Aug. 26, 2003.

Hypocrisy in Action — U.S. vs. N. Korea

By Bonnie Urfer

In on-going banter between North Korea and the U.S., North Korea declared it already had a nuclear weapon and threatened to conduct a nuclear test if the United States does not offer a non-aggression treaty. The U.S. refuses such a treaty saying that North Korea first must dismantle its nuclear program. Senator Richard Lugar, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, suggested that the Bush administration might use economic sanctions against North Korea if it continues to develop a nuclear weapon.

Six nations gathered in Beijing during the last week of August to discuss the dismantling of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program. China joined the talks with the U.S., North Korea, South Korea, Japan and Russia. China sits in a key position because of its long-time alliance with N. Korea and its growing relationship with the U.S. China urged further negotiation when talks became heated and stalled. All agreed to resume the discussion within two months.

Japan feels especially vulnerable to the North Korean threat. Just hours after North Korea announced its intent to test a nuclear weapon, Japan’s Defense Ministry asked its Parliament to spend \$1 billion a year through 2007 to build an American-designed missile-defense shield to defend the main cities of the Japanese archipelago.

Japan has been working to develop a space wars system with regular launches from Tanegashima, Japan, and from the U.S., as NASA is helping Japan to launch its space war equipment. With the new plans, Japan — the world’s fourth biggest defense spender after the United States, Russia and China — would realign portions of its \$42 billion budget to address the threat from North Korea.

Some members of the Bush administration have argued that North Korea does not intend to stop its nuclear program and are pushing for a tougher approach including sanctions, inspections, interdiction of seaborne cargo, and military ac-

nuclear weapons. Participants came from Germany, Belgium, Sweden, Kurdistan, the UK and USA.

The Sept. 1 action was part of peace demonstrations all across Germany held annually to memorialize the date in 1939 when German forces invaded Poland, beginning the Second World War and eventually ending the lives of 50 million people. It was also the 20th anniversary of the giant blockades of the Mutlagen Air Force Base near here where the U.S. had positioned Pershing II medium-range nuclear missiles during the cold war.

The anti-nuclear movement has employed the citizen inspection campaign across four European countries (Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Italy) and Turkey, all of which are used by the Pentagon for the “forward deployment” of U.S. nuclear weapons. Since the end of the cold war the United States is the only government that places its nuclear weapons in other countries.

As the ten inspectors and about 20 supporters expected to be turned away, they carried signs that announced, “Closed for War Crimes Inspection.” The signs were read by the hundreds of employees who were turned away from the blockaded entrances. The authorities had to open a fourth gate, closed for the past 10 years, for workers and military personnel.

The thwarted inspection came as the last stop of a ten-day-long “Bike-for-Peace” tour by about 30 cyclists that began August 22 in the village of Kaiserslautern. The 300 kilometer tour made protest stops at four U.S. Air Force bases and an Army ammunition depot on the way to Büchel. The cyclists targeted Ramstein Air Force Base (AFB), the 2nd largest U.S. base in Germany, because it is the center of troop deployment for U.S. forces going to Afghanistan and Iraq. The Spengdahlem AFB, where we attempted an informal inspection, is the launching place for the infamous A-10 “Warthog” aircraft that has fired many tons of depleted uranium munitions into Iraq both in 1991 and this past spring. Thirty-millimeter depleted uranium shells are fired by the A-10 at a rate of 60 rounds per second.

Coming on the tail end of the summer-long heat wave that has plagued Europe and ruined as much as 80 percent of the crops in some places, the cyclists enjoyed sunny warm weather for nine of ten days. I was honored to be the only U.S. citizen on the tour and had the chance at several stops to describe anti-war activities across the United States and to thank the Germans and the French for their stalwart opposition to the U.S. war on Iraq. Just as the commercial news industry ignores anti-war activities in the U.S., the German public saw practically no news coverage of the large peace marches that took place in 115 U.S. cities.

Photos of the inspection at Büchel AFB can be seen at the websites of the groups GAAA, German Nonviolent Action for Abolition of Nuclear Weapons, and For Mother Earth.



Clay Bennett/*The Christian Science Monitor*

Another Nuclear Submarine Sinks in the Barents Sea

The nuclear age is catching up with itself as yet another Russian nuclear submarine has sunk to the ocean floor with two reactors aboard. This time a 40-year-old, *K-159* submarine sank in the Barents Sea on August 30 as it was being towed to a junkyard for dismantling. Nine crew members died as the submarine submerged in 560 feet of water.

The onboard reactors had been shut down in 1989 but the irradiated fuel rods had never been removed. The *K-159*, a November-class attack submarine, was decommissioned on July 16, 1989.

According to news reports, rough seas battered the aged vessel situated on four floating hulls. Waves ripped the pontoons off as the sub was being towed from its base in the town of Gremikha to Polarnye, 800 miles north of Moscow.

Although the navy insisted that the *K-159*’s nuclear reactors posed no environmental hazard, environmentalists quickly warned of a possible radiation leak that could contaminate the busy fishing area.

This major accident in the Barents Sea follows a similar disaster on August 12, 2000, in which the nuclear powered submarine the *Kursk*, an Oscar II-class vessel, sank with 118 men aboard. The *Kursk* was eventually raised from the Barents Sea floor in October 2001. According to a Navy Spokesman, the *K-159* submarine will also be raised.

Russia has about 200 decommissioned submarines, which clutter harbors and pose an increasing environmental risk. Most of them still have their irradiated fuel on board. Russian scientists say the radiation locked inside the corroding hulls of 122 decommissioned nuclear-powered submarines represents 3,000 times the radiation levels of the A-bomb that destroyed Hiroshima in 1945. Defueling the fleet, placing the fuel in safe interim storage and doing modest environmental clean-up is expected to cost a minimum of \$300-\$400 billion over 30 to 40 years.

The long list of accidents involving Russian nuclear submarines includes the following:

On June 29, 2002, a first generation Echo-II class nuclear submarine, the *Shkval*, fell on its portside in a floating dock during decommissioning at the Polyarny naval shipyard on the Kola Peninsula. The *Shkval* had been floating in dock on keel holders at the naval shipyard when it fell on its side. Luckily the irradiated fuel rods had been removed earlier.

In May of 2002 a *K-192*’s damaged fuel rods were loaded on a train in Polyarny and sent to a reprocessing facility in southern Ural. Yury Vishnevsky, head of Russia’s nuclear regulatory agency, reported that upon arrival some parts of the irradiated rods were missing and their location unknown. The fuel rods were removed from the submarine in 2000.

On April 7, 1989, the *K-278 Komsomolets* sank in the Norwegian Sea following a fire. The sub had a reactor and two nuclear warheads aboard. A fire broke out, short-circuiting the electrical system. The fire spread quickly and the submarine lost power and ran out of compressed air. The vessel sank to a depth of 510 feet. Forty-one people were killed.

On October 6, 1986, the nuclear sub *K-219*, equipped with two nuclear reactors and carrying 16 nuclear missiles, sank in the Atlantic Ocean north of Bermuda. An explosion in one of the missile tubes led to a chain of events that resulted in a fire. Four people died.

April 10, 1970, the *K-8* sank in the Bay of Biscay off the coast of Spain. Two fires began simultaneously, tripping the emergency reactor system and leaving the submarine without power. Some crew members were evacuated, but by April 11 the submarine had sunk to 1,418 feet. Fifty-two people died.