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Seven arrested at weekend of demonstrations in Kansas City area

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- Highlighting a unique demonstration of national security interests, peace activists gathered in the Kansas City area April 13-15 to call attention to nuclear weapons, unmanned drone attacks and the detention of accused WikiLeaks source Bradley Manning.

The three-day convergence, called a "Trifecta Resista" by organizers, saw people from across the Midwest gather for three lively demonstrations in the area. Seven people were arrested over the weekend for such acts.

On April 13, the activists gathered outside an entry point for Fort Leavenworth, Kan., where Manning has been held at the Army's Joint Regional Correctional Facility.

The treatment of Manning, an Army private accused of leaking thousands of confidential diplomatic cables to WikiLeaks, previously spurred protests from supporters and human rights groups. Before being transferred to Leavenworth last April, Manning was held at the Marine brig in Quantico, Va., where he was placed into solitary confinement and wore only a suicide-proof smock each night.

In their second and third demonstrations, activists called attention to the construction in Kansas City of the nation's first new nuclear weapons manufacturing facility in 33 years and to the U.S. military's unmanned attack drones used in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan, which are controlled from nearby Whiteman Air Force Base.

The activists released balloons into the air outside the Air Force base April 15, symbolizing the more than 530 civilians killed by drone attacks in Pakistan alone since President Barack Obama took office, a number from a study by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism.

Afterward, three of the activists were arrested for walking onto the base. They were met by a line of about 50 soldiers wearing riot gear and were taken away briefly for processing.

One of the activists arrested for walking over the link onto the grounds of the nuclear weapons manufacturing site said she felt compelled to act for her 10 grandchildren.

"If there's anything I can do to prevent them becoming a victim of nuclear waste or fallout, I have to do it," said Lu Mountenay, an ordained minister with the Community of Christ in Independence, Mo.

Also among the three arrested at the Whiteman protest were Brian Terrell, a co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, and Mark Kenney, an Omaha, Neb., native. Kenney was arrested in Omaha for acts of civil disobedience after walking about 10 steps onto Offutt Air Force Base while protesting U.S. Strategic Command, which operates at the base and is responsible for the planning and targeting of the nation's nuclear weapons.

Kenney told *NCR* before his six-month incarceration that he felt he had to continue his witness because of his conversion experience, which took place while he was serving in the U.S. Navy in the 1970s.

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Asked about his choice to partake in the Whiteman action last weekend, Kenney said he felt compelled to act because the military-industrial complex is "directing our faith when our faith should be directing our actions."

Kathy Kelly, a co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence known for her peace activism, and retired U.S. Army Colonel Ann Wright, who resigned her diplomatic post in 2003 to protest George W. Bush's decision to begin bombing Iraq, also attended the protests. The rest of the group was made up of a number of Catholic Workers, including those from the White Rose Catholic Worker in Chicago and the Holy Family and Cherith Brook communities in Kansas City, and members of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth.

Each of the seven activists arrested were released shortly after and await future trial dates on trespassing charges. Because of their previous acts of civil disobedience, Kenney and Terrell are subject to two to six months in prison.

Editor's Note: *NCR*'s Robyn Haas was at each of the weekend actions, and took the photos contained in the slideshow below.

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