

Nörvenich October 12 2024 – Susan van der Hijden

In July 2017, in the middle of the day, I walked with several people, including a group of catholic workers from Europe and the US, with a loaf of bread that had been blessed by us a few minutes earlier, at the Büchel nuclear airfield through the open gates at the traffic circle, the small gate next to the guard's office and the barriers. A little further on are some displayed fighter jets on which I placed the bread. North American participants took down the US flag, which hangs in a tall mast near the entrance, and tried to raise it upside down before being stopped by German Soldiers. It was one of the first actions of the International Peace Camp in Büchel. Despite being able to walk quite far into the compound no one was persecuted.

During the peace camp in the summer of 2018, again during daylight, with a large group of supporters, we went to Büchel and cut five holes in the fence in 5 places, a few meters apart, and again entered the base. One group, including a person in a wheelchair, began to play a game of basketball on the sports field near the base, others managed to reach a bunker where they climbed up and remained undiscovered for a long time. We were discovered in groups and taken to the soldiers' canteen where we were given tea, then our details were written down and we were taken on a bus to the other side of the base and put on the street. This time we were all charged though.

More actions followed, but I wanted to mention these two because at the same time they were very serious and at the same time brought so much hope and joy.

Civil disobedience is not something you do just like that and not for fun. The consequences can be very serious for yourself and those around you. I have been in prison for 4 months this year, Susan Crane is still in prison until January, Dennis DuVall may be deported because of his participation in actions in Büchel.

Nor can I say that our actions at Büchel have resulted in fewer nuclear weapons, except that there is now a much sturdier fence around the air base and the bombs are guarded a little better than before we were there. When we went in there several times each summer, the fence was still as inviting as the fence here around Nörvenich Air Base.

Also, choosing to go to jail when you can also pay the tagessätzen and moreover they won't come and get you from Holland seems like a useless waste of time. The other women in prison could appreciate the civil disobedience but they did not understand going to prison voluntarily. And frankly, it is also somewhere unbecoming to go there voluntarily, with all my friends, money and mail, while the women around me had lost their jobs, lost their homes upon release, whose partners moved on to another and whose children were increasingly alienated from their mothers. No one gets out of prison better than how she goes in. On the contrary, and on top of all these new additional problems, you then have a criminal record!

So why did I do it anyway

First, doing nothing was not an option. We have become accustomed to the fact that there is always war somewhere but this is not normal. When NATO holds an exercise with nuclear weapons, spotters come together to have a beer and take pictures. We have forgotten what war is or we don't want to remember. I live with refugees and hear their stories. (That there are refugees is also something we think is quite normal these days, even a little inconvenient...) Stories of fear, hunger, torture. I see around me that there is too little money for healthcare and education and that there are children in my country who go to school without breakfast while the military gets more and more money. I have

spoken in Kansas city with relatives of people who died of brain cancer after working to manufacture the nuclear bombs that are in Büchel. Doing nothing is not an option!

Second: All the legal things I had done before and with little effect. Breaking the law allowed me to reach a new audience, for example in court, but I also think I would not have stood here as a speaker if I had signed a petition against nuclear weapons or voted for an anti-nuclear politician.

Third, and perhaps my favorite reason; Civil disobedience has taught me that something or someone has power over me only when I give that power to the other person. Being in prison has taught me that being free, or feeling free, does not depend on others, but on how I treat those others.

It may seem small, but it is important to practice disobedience. After all, wars can only be fought with obedient soldiers. Just as a service dog can only be a good service dog when he is able to disobey when it is safer for his master, a human can also be a much better fellow human when he has trained himself in disobedience.

Lastly, I wanted to mention that I also enjoy civil disobedience. It gives me a lot of energy and helps me feel less gloomy about the world.

We as humanity are capable of going other ways than the beaten path and if enough people realize that they don't have to obey war rhetoric and military-industrial interests then we might have a chance at peace.

Therefore: stop NATO! Stop war exercises! Abolish nuclear weapons!