

War protest garners trio prison time

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — On the surface, Harry Murray, Frank Carver and Peter de Mott would appear to have little in common.

Murray, 39, a parishioner of Corpus Christi Church in Rochester, is a sociology professor at Nazareth College.

Carver, 68, a member of St. James the Apostle Parish in Trumansburg, is a retired school teacher.

And de Mott, 44, who belongs to St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Ithaca, is an independent contractor.

But on Dec. 9, 1990, the three men — along with 25 other people — scaled the fence at the Seneca Army Depot in Romulus to protest the alleged storage of nuclear weapons at the facility and what was then the possibility of war in the Persian Gulf.

Because the three men were repeat offenders, the judge sentenced them April 10 to serve time in the Salvation Army Community Correctional Facility, 745 West Ave., and to community service.

In addition to performing 500 hours of community service, Murray and de Mott each must spend three months in the half-way house, plus three additional months on probation. Carver must spend 45 days in the facility, and perform 200 hours of community service.

The trio was assigned to clean up damage caused by the March 3 ice storm, leading de Mott to observe, "Frank and Harry and I have been assigned to do ice storm cleanup. We think it's ironic the cleanup for (Operation) Desert Storm goes on unnoticed and undone."

All three men believe that the war in the Persian Gulf should never have happened. They gathered at the Seneca Army Depot Dec. 9 to protest the ongoing buildup of U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf.

"The nation was preparing for war and, as a Christian, I felt I had to make the strongest nonviolent statement that I could that that preparation for war was wrong," Murray explained.

All three men were aware that they might serve time because of their previous violations, Murray acknowledged. They felt, however, they had to take the risk, he said.

"When there's a conflict between the law of humans and the law of God, I'm obligated to obey the law of God," Murray said.

All three men have been arrested previously for protests at the Seneca Army Depot and elsewhere. They had also served sentences for prior convictions. Murray said.

Of the three, de Mott has spent the most time in jail. He has served 15 sentences



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

Peter de Mott (from left), Harry Murray and Frank Carver take time out from their community-service duties at Genesee Valley Park April 25. For scaling the fence at the Seneca Army Depot in Romulus Dec. 9, 1990, the three men were sentenced to serve time at the Salvation Army Community Correctional Facility and to perform community service. They climbed the depot fence to protest the alleged storage of nuclear weapons at the facility and the possibility of war in the Persian Gulf.

totalling approximately two years. According to de Mott, his anti-war activities represent a radical turnabout in perspective. A Vietnam veteran, de Mott served approximately seven-and-a-half years in the Marines and the U.S. Army.

During his stint in the U.S. Army in the early 1970s, de Mott traveled to the Soviet Union. That visit, he said, began to change his thinking.

"I saw that the Russian people, our putative enemy at that time, had the same human qualities that American people had," de Mott explained.

After leaving the service, de Mott earned a degree from the University of Nebraska at Omaha before joining the Catholic Worker House in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1979. It was during his years at the Catholic Worker House that de Mott began to participate in civil disobedience.

Carver, too, began to question government policies through the Catholic Worker movement. In the early 1940s, Carver, then a student at Notre Dame University, began to deliver surplus food from the university's dining halls to the South Bend Catholic Worker House.

Remaining in contact with the Catholic Worker movement over the years, led him to an awareness of "the connection between military expenditures and poverty," Carver explained.

In 1979, Carver, like de Mott, began to

participate in civil disobedience to protest policies of the U.S. military and government.

Because the men are serving their terms in Rochester, Murray was allowed to continue his teaching duties at Nazareth College until the end of the semester. In fact, students from his crime and justice course attended his trial.

On the other hand, de Mott has been unable to continue his work as a contractor during his time in the facility, which means his family has had to rely on the earnings his wife, Ellen Grady, makes with a part-time job. Before beginning his sentence April 16, de Mott he took out a loan to tide his wife and two children — 5-year-old Marie and 2-year-old Katie — over until his release.

Murray, who has two young children of his own — 6-year-old Thomas and 3-year-old Colin — acknowledged that some people might wonder why he and de Mott would choose to risk prison.

"I view that as part of my responsibility as a father to do the best I can to make sure my children have a decent world to grow

up in," Murray said. "Hopefully, I'm setting the best example that I can — which is to challenge evil as best I can in a nonviolent action."

"I find the separation from (my family) very painful," de Mott said, "but know that without sacrifice we won't accomplish much. We need to make sacrifices to ensure a more just and peaceful world for the children."

"I hope that my children see in my efforts a love for them and a love for all of God's creation, and they in their turn will carry on the work," de Mott added.

Despite their efforts, however, the war in the Persian Gulf did take place. But none of the three expressed any sense of failure.

"It brings focus to the issue," Carver said, "so that more people become aware. Sometimes, it takes something dramatic to key into the awareness of people."

"The point is to be faithful to the Gospel," Murray asserted, "to have a faith that my action may not have been effective, but that it will be fruitful, that the action is something God may use in his own way."

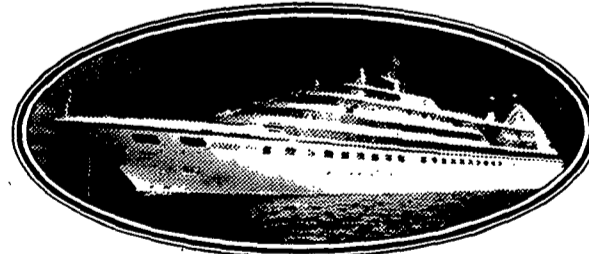
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