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Activists to walk 165 miles to protest drone warfare

Megan Fincher | May. 29, 2014 NCR Today

"They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?' And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. ... Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread" (Luke 24: 32-33, 35).

The average American walks less than 3 miles per day, but a group of average Americans plan to walk 15 miles per day for 12 days in June. These folks aren't doing it for fitness; rather, they're walking 165 miles to protest drone warfare.

The Chicago-based peace group Voices for Creative Nonviolence is organizing a walk that will take place June 3-14 called "On the Road to Ground the Drones [1]." The walkers will protest both the development and deployment of drones happening right in America's heartland.

Drones are unmanned aerial vehicles that military pilots operate remotely. The technology is so advanced that drones can fly from Air Force bases in the United States to countries in the Middle East. Drones are equipped with surveillance technology, bombs and missiles, and, akin to a video game, pilots view human targets on a computer screen and use a joystick to release munitions.

Voices for Creative Nonviolence said the upcoming walk is a means to draw attention to the life cycle of drones. The activist group is concerned about the manufacturing of drones in our backyard. They also want to raise awareness of drone command bases located on U.S. soil: At least 64 bases exist [2], and more are in development.

The walk will begin in Chicago at Boeing, one of the largest producers of drones in the United States; will continue along Lake Michigan's south shore and through southwest Michigan; and will end at the Kellogg Air National Guard base in Battle Creek, Mich., a future drone command base.

In June 2013, *NCR* reported [3] on Voices for Creative Nonviolence's first anti-drone walk. Their goal was the same: to raise awareness of both the creation of drones and their eventual mission of destruction. Activists trekked 190 miles from the Rock Island Arsenal in Illinois, where drone engine components are produced, to the Des Moines Air National Guard Facility at the Des Moines International Airport in Iowa, the future location of a drone operation center.

The 2013 walk took seven days to complete, so this year, with a 12-day walk planned, the group is upping the ante.

The Department of Defense is upping the ante, as well. A Congressional Research Service report [4] released Jan. 30, 2013, stated that both the U.S. and global drone market will "experience strong growth during the next 10 years." Worldwide annual spending on drone research, development, testing and evaluation as well as procurement is projected to rise from $6.6 billion in 2013 to $11.4 billion in 2022, with a total spending forecast of $89.1 billion.

The U.S. share of those figures is expected to account for 62 percent of drone research, development, testing and evaluation, and U.S. drone procurement will amount to 55 percent of those figures.

"We call these drones Reapers and they shoot Hellfire missiles," Brian Terrell, co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, told *NCR* last year [3].

"The government has made a religion around death and it has incorporated these religious images for their own use, and that is blasphemous," he said at the time.

"I hope people find security in other means, like treating people fairly," Kathy Kelly, co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, told *NCR* last year [3].

"Instead, security is often predicated on our being able to use threat and force to subdue people all around the world. ... That's not a very durable security," she said.

Just as Jesus opened the hearts of Cleopas and Simon on the road to Emmaus, Voices for Creative Nonviolence will have a similar opportunity in June, encountering strangers on the road and, hopefully, setting some hearts afire.

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Links:
[1] http://vcnv.org/on-the-road-to-ground-the-drones
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