

## THE SECRET SEVEN GO TO AIRSTRIP ONE

It was 12th April. The Peacewatch camp at Gate 10 of the US Air Force Base at Fairford, Gloucestershire had been in place for about six weeks, monitoring and logging plane activity at the base, as this was the only way to know for sure what kind of bombs were being dropped on Iraq. The Camp's powerful peace message was clearly demonstrated by the strenuous efforts of Police and Military to close it down. Police, no doubt guided by the Blair Government, used the Terrorism Act to repeatedly stop and search everyone going to and from the camp. We had heard about this endless harassment and intimidation, so we decided to spend a weekend at Gate 10, to offer our support to the Peacewatch campers.

Seven members of our group set off from Wrexham in an elderly Renault Espace. Thanks to Jo Car of Buckley for the hire vehicle – we couldn't have afforded one from anywhere else! We had no idea whether the Police would let us through the roadblocks they had set up near the camp, so had the car crammed with camping equipment and food in case we were forced to camp elsewhere.

Previous campers at Gate 10 had been arrested and, bizarrely, charged for having toothbrushes and a jar of peanut butter, with bail conditions prohibiting their return to the camp, and Police had instructions not to let anyone through with more tents. Police forces had been drafted in to Fairford from all over the country and, luckily for us, Norfolk Police had obviously never been camping before. After enquiring whether we were going to construct a "bender" from the two flimsy bamboo poles we use for our banner, they waved through our bike trailer-load of tents, sleeping bags and toothbrushes. We were in!

Visiting the camp was an emotional experience for all of us. It was a place of life, love and hope, full of people committed to peace at great personal cost, in colourful contrast to the grim, grey airbase beyond the fence and razor wire. Fairford is a surreal place. A pleasant country lane runs from the village of Kempford to Gate 10. On one side of the lane are fields and pretty cottages. On the other there is the base, protected by police, 3 layers of wire and US military personnel with rifles.



The B-52s themselves are huge, threatening machines painted matt grey. Like the worried residents of Fairford, we watched these planes being loaded with their weapons of terror and destruction, were woken by the vibration and noise, and tasted the kerosene as they took off.



Soon after we arrived at Fairford, we witnessed a terrifying and sobering event – a B-52 plane had developed mechanical problems, (they are all elderly), and was returning to the base with all its bombs still hanging under its wings. Its first attempt at landing failed, and we watched as it flew round again, this time wobbling noticeably as it landed just 100 yards from us. The dire consequences for everyone in the vicinity had a wing scraped the ground are unthinkable. With every flight, Fairford residents' lives were at risk.

On 3 May, once all the B-52s had flown back to the US, the Peace Camp closed, its work done for the present. The campaigners will continue to hold weekend camps, and an exhibition about the Camp will tour festivals and events this summer. The Royal International Air Tattoo (RIAT) is held at Fairford in July, which may provide an opportunity for action - or at least the novelty of getting into the base legally!

### Web Links:

Gloucester Weapons Inspectors: [www.gwi.org.uk](http://www.gwi.org.uk)  
Peacewatch: [www.fairfordpeacewatch.com](http://www.fairfordpeacewatch.com)  
Fairford Supporters E-group: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/fairfordpeacewatchsupporters>  
Campaign for the Accountability of American Bases: [www.caab.org.uk](http://www.caab.org.uk)