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One-Stop Bombing

The U.S. Navy's Assault on the Puerto Rican Island of Vieques

by Lenora Todaro

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The U.S. Navy claims the Puerto Rican Island of Vieques is the only place where its Atlantic fleet can hold simultaneous land, air, and sea exercises using live bombs. Thousands of Viequenses believe their land and livelihoods are being poisoned and destroyed as a result, and opposition to the Navy's presence has grown significantly stronger. In recent weeks, another bombing mission has prompted more demonstrations and a spate of high-profile arrests. Here, a story told mostly in numbers.

Number of years Puerto Rico has been a U.S. territory: **101**

Number of years the U.S. Navy has used the Puerto Rican island of Vieques as a practice bombing-range: **60**

Percent of all bombs dropped by U.S. in military practice that land in Vieques, according to local residents: **90**

Percent of Vieques land controlled by U.S. Navy: **70** (about 22,000 of 33,000 acres; Vieques is twice the size of Manhattan)

Population of Vieques: **9300**

Population of Kahoolawe, Hawaii, practice bombing-range used by U.S. Navy until 1994: **0**

Percentage of Viequenses who live below the poverty line: **72**

Number of people from Vieques employed by the U.S. Navy: **30**

Number of tourists who visit Vieques per year: **4000**

Locations of conflicts that U.S. troops have trained for in Vieques: **Cuba, Santo Domingo, Chile, Grenada, Vietnam, Iraq, and Kosovo**

Pounds of live explosives, including napalm, dropped on Vieques in November 1994, when troops were preparing for war in Yugoslavia: **20,000**

Number of radioactive depleted uranium shells (which are believed to contribute to development of cancer and leukemia, among other illnesses) that the U.S. Navy admitted firing on Vieques in 1998: **273**

Number of depleted uranium shells the Navy said were "accidentally" fired on Vieques in February 1999: **263**

Number retrieved: **56**

Estimated number of unexploded bombs in Vieques, according to local residents: **"thousands and thousands"**

Average number of days per year the Navy bombed Vieques before President Clinton's January 2000 decree that said the Navy would only use inert (nonexploding) bombs until 2003: **260**

Average number of days the U.S. fires nonexploding bombs (which are extremely noisy and stir up contaminated soil) on Vieques per year now: **90**

Number of people who marched in San Juan, Puerto Rico, to protest the decree: **150,000**

Number of "dummy" bombs fired from sea to land from April 27 to May 1, 2001, according to the commissioner of Vieques: **352**

Number of missiles from air to land, during the same period: **168**

Estimated number of protesters, including Vieques mayor Damaso Serrano, who were in the target range while Navy dropped bombs: **40 to 50**

Number of fishing traps lost in those four days as a result of bombing: **600-700**

Estimated loss of fishermen's income and property: **\$360,000**

Estimated number of local fishermen affected: **52**

Estimated amount paid by NATO allies to lease Vieques from the U.S. for target practice: **\$80 million per year**

Amount offered Puerto Rico by President Clinton in January 2000 to continue the bombing for three more years: **\$40 million**

Percentage above legal levels of environmental pollutants that the U.S. Navy has admitted to discharging: **arsenic, 6.6; lead, 105; cadmium, 240**

Diseases found to have higher rates in Vieques than on Puerto Rico's mainland: **cancer, scleroderma, lupus, thyroid deficiencies, asthma**

Odds that Viequenses will develop cancer as compared to other Puerto Ricans: **27 percent higher**

Number of hospitals on Vieques: **0**

Travel time to nearest hospital: **one and a half hours by ferry**

Number of hotels: **25**

Number of civil disobedience camps that sprang up inside the target range after civilian David Sanes was killed by two 500-pound live bombs that missed their mark: **14**

Number of months it took U.S. marshals to shut down the camps: **12**

Total number of arrests since the bombing began: **1111**

Number of arrests in the last two years, since the death of David Sanes: **500**

Recent high-profile arrests: **Reverend Al Sharpton, actor Edward James Olmos, environmental lawyer Robert F. Kennedy Jr., New York labor leader Dennis Rivera, Congressman Luis Gutierrez (D-ILL), Vieques mayor Serrano**

Approximate cost of the one-page ad in *The New York Times* calling for an end to the bombing (signed by actor Benicio del Toro, singers Ricky Martin, José Feliciano, and Marc Anthony, baseball player Roberto Alomar, and other celebrities): **\$113,274**

Number of Puerto Rican activists who climbed the Statue of Liberty to protest in November 2000: **11**

Population of Puerto Ricans in NYC in 1990: **897,000**

Members of Congress from New York City who were among the 110 who signed a letter in March 2001 urging President Bush to permanently end the bombing in Vieques: **José Serrano, Nydia Velázquez, Charles Rangel, Ed Towns, Major Owens, Elliot Engel, Nita Lowey, Anthony D. Weiner, Gregory Meeks, Carolyn McCarthy, Joseph Crowley, Carolyn Maloney, Charles Schumer, and Hillary Clinton**

Options voters in Vieques will be given in a referendum on the bombing this November: **allow the U.S. Navy to resume the use of exploding bombs, for which the people of Vieques will receive \$50 million in aid; or permit the Navy to use nonexploding bombs until 2003, after which it will leave the island**

Option not available on the referendum: **immediate cessation of all bombing**

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