

AUSSIE ACTIVIST ON TRIAL

Committed Christian Moana took on the US Air Force for her beliefs, and now faces internment, trial and, possibly, a long prison sentence

JUDY FULLER

A blue moon was shining when Moana Cole last saw the night sky; the first blue moon to shine on the US east coast on New Year's Eve for 19 years.

The sky was alight as she climbed over snow-covered hills and through barbed wire to pour her blood onto the runway of Griffiss Air Force Base in Rome, New York State.

When The Weekly spoke to Moana several weeks later, she had not seen the outside world, not even a ray of daylight or a spark of moonlight, for more than a week.

The tall, slim 22-year-old Australian spends 23 of every 24 hours alone in a tiny, windowless cell in the Syracuse Public Safety Building in New York



A US Air Force B-52 bomber. TOP: Moana's parents, Pearl and Dale.



WHY MOANA WENT TO JAIL FOR HER BELIEFS

State. Through the bars of her cell door she watches the war news.

"At this particular time, I can't think of a better place to be in this country, if you have any integrity, than in jail," she said. Moana and three companions from the Catholic Worker movement have been charged with destruction of government property and conspiring to destroy government property at Griffiss. The charges carry sentences of 10 years and five years respectively. When the four — Ciaran O'Reilly, 30, of Brisbane, Susan Frankel, 27, an American journalist, William Streit, 35, an American Catholic priest and Moana — broke into Griffiss last New Year's Eve, Ciaran and Moana poured blood on the runway and then began to dig it up.

They eventually chipped two holes, one of them two metres in diameter, before they were found by guards. Susan Frankel and William Streit reached a B-52 bomber and had begun to hammer at its engines. All were arrested.

Moana says she was not frightened at the time, although the guards were

armed and authorised to use "deadly force" against any intruders.

"It wasn't really scary. It's very hard to describe. It was more of an act of faith. It was going in there with the confidence that what we were doing was very faithful and very truthful."

The four have pleaded not guilty and are due to appear before a grand jury this month. They have refused bail because it was conditional on them not returning to Griffiss and not breaking the law again.

"We said no to that because we knew if war broke out, and it hadn't at that stage, we couldn't stand by and be voyeurs. When it happened, we'd have had to break the law which says it's okay to go to war. So we wouldn't really be free because our consciences wouldn't be free to act."

Moana's cell in the Syracuse prison measures 2.4 metres x 1.2 metres. It opens to a barred corridor around which another 20 cells are situated. Every cell has a view, through its bars, of one of the five television sets in the cell block.

"The news we see on television is coming out now saying let's get back to business as usual, let's give the appearance of normalcy," Moana said.

"I think the times we live in aren't normal and getting back to business as usual is denying things that are happening. Normalcy, for most of the world, isn't happening and the lifestyle that we're living isn't normal or admirable or one that we should be living."

Moana's restricted life behind bars is a huge contrast to her childhood when, as a sea captain's daughter, she spent the first six years of her life travelling the world. She was educated in New Zealand, Thursday Island, Cairns, Bundaberg and Brisbane, before enrolling at Griffith University in Brisbane in 1986.

In her final year at university, she joined Ciaran O'Reilly and other members of the Catholic Worker movement in protests against visits by US Navy ships. This resulted in her first arrest for peace activism. Her parents now live in



Sue Frankel and Moana Cole in the visiting room of the Public Safety Building in Syracuse, NY.

Brisbane and are 100 per cent supportive of Moana's peace activities.

"We were shell-shocked," Moana's mother, Pearl Cavander-Cole, said, when told her daughter had been arrested. "It was like receiving news of a bereavement. But I tell you, I'm going to jump from the rooftops for Moana, because she's so brave. I'm tremendously proud of her, because I believe she really has lived the gospel as Christ laid it out. All the churches preach it, and don't live it." She added: "Moana's a joyous, happy, bright young woman who nevertheless feels very deeply."

Moana admits she is finding jail in-

credibly tough, particularly now, as she and Susan are in a sort of watch-house rather than an actual prison facility. "There are no windows. We just have lots of TV bombardment, 24 hours a day, almost," she said. Watching television is the way prisoners have of knowing whether it is night or day.

"To get out of your cell you have to ask someone to open your door and to get back in you have to ask someone. You're in a very confined space 23 hours a day. And we've had a lot of problems getting vegetarian meals. We're allowed outside, onto the roof, for one hour a day, but that's impractical at the moment be-

Exclusive!

cause it's zero degrees temperature here — and that's Fahrenheit! I haven't been outside for a week now. It's isolated, and it's all orientated towards making you feel isolated and forgotten. It's very inhuman and that's the way the system is."

In the hour they are allowed out of their cells, Moana and Susan hold a prayer gathering for other prisoners — mainly black and Hispanic women waiting for hearings on drug-related petty larceny charges.

Moana is allowed

'We are following people like Gandhi and Martin Luther King, and all sorts of non-violent resisters in jail for the sake of peace and justice'

only two private phone calls a week, each of five minutes. She and Susan Frankel will fast each Friday, in solidarity with other peace people, for the duration of the Gulf war. Moana says even though she could be sentenced to 10 or 15 years, she would see herself as actively working for peace all the time she is in jail.

"I think prison speaks to people's conscience very strongly. We see ourselves as following a whole tradition of resistance within the Catholic religion, with the saints and martyrs. We see ourselves following people like Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Thoreau and all sorts of non-violent resisters around the world, in jail for the sake of peace and justice."

"I have no regrets about the action we took," Moana added. "I'm proud of what I've done."

— LIZ JOHNSTON