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demonstrators say

Thursday morning, S

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Navy under fire in train-protester tragedy

By Alan Gathright
and Kristin Huckshorn
Mercury News Staff Writers

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they believed it was traveling faster than 5 mph, the speed given by the Navy.

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- *A profile of Willson, Page 1C*
- *War wounds reopened, Page 1B*

In Berkeley, about 400 chanting protesters marched through the streets Wednesday night in anger over the incident.

University of California at Berkeley campus police said two windows were broken and the front door damaged slightly at Callaghan Hall, the headquarters of the

local ROTC and several military training programs.

The crowd, which began gathering about 8 p.m. was dispersed by 10:20 p.m. and there were no arrests, according to Tom Debley, spokesman for the university.

Rep. Ron Dellums, D-Oakland, said that he would ask the secretary of the Navy to conduct a full investigation. "I am shocked to learn of the Navy's reckless action at the

See WILLSON, Back Page

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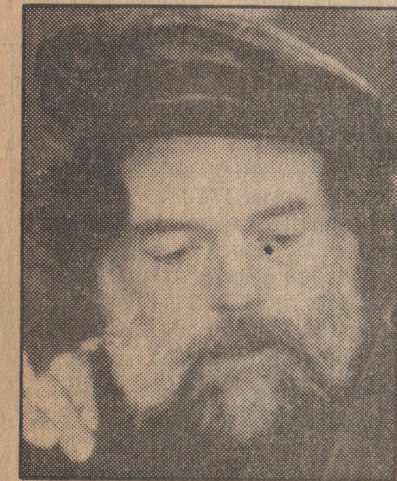
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See WILLSON, Back Page



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WILLSON, from Page 1A

Concord Naval Weapons Station. . . .” Dellums said in a statement released by an aide. “I am upset and angry because there is absolutely no excuse for what happened.”

Witnesses said that Navy medics arrived immediately after Willson was hit, but without equipment to provide intravenous fluids needed by shock victims.

Dan Tikalski, a base spokesman, said the Navy would have no detailed comment about the incident until after a team of Navy investigators arrives from Washington, D.C., today. He reiterated earlier statements from the base commander that the train did not appear to be going unusually fast and that demonstrators had jumped onto the tracks at the last minute — too late for the train to stop.

He also said that the train's civilian engineer had been told to stop if there was anyone on the tracks. A videotape shows the brakeman and conductor riding outside the engineers' cabin as spotters just before Willson was hit.

One witness said one of the spotters yelled, “We're going on through,” as the train approached.

Others said they couldn't hear because of the train's air horn.

Demonstrators accused the Navy of rolling the train through the protest in a high-stakes war of nerves. “They figured that it was a game of chicken and these rabbits were going to scurry away,” said Duncan Murphy, whose leg was gashed by the passing train.

Capt. Russell Pitkin, who is supervising the investigation for the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Department, said a report on whether criminal charges should be brought against the engineers should be ready later this week.

Pitkin also said the sheriff's office had asked base personnel to call 30 minutes before they wanted help removing demonstrators from the tracks. He said that at 11:33 a.m., “the naval station called and asked us to come out.” Deputy Bill Landis arrived at 11:57 a.m. and found that minutes before, Willson had been hit.

The Rev. David Duncombe, 59, of San Francisco, who with Murphy leapt off the track just before impact, said he thought the accident would fuel support for the veterans' drive to end arms shipments to Central America.

“I think we've got a Kent State

out here in the making,” Duncombe said.

Rauen and other activists also plan two rallies this week: One is scheduled for noon today at the Santa Cruz County Courthouse. The other is scheduled at noon Saturday at the accident site.

The veterans and peace activists had gathered Tuesday to commence a 40-day fast that would focus national attention on their cause — much as a similar fast by Willson and other veterans had last year in Washington, D.C.

The group had been staging daily protests at the Concord site since June 10 without incident.

(CONT A)

(A) In an Aug. 21 letter to the naval station commander, Willson said that the group intended to block the track.

“If not incarcerated, deceased or otherwise disabled, I am committed, as the spirit moves me, to be physically on the tracks for part of each of the 40 days,” he wrote. “Some of us have decided to put ourselves on the line to save lives of other people who are worth no less than us.”

A group of about 40 veterans and activists began gathering near the track Tuesday about 10 a.m. John Skerce, a 42-year-old Vietnam veteran from San Francisco,

and Bob Spitzer, a 60-year-old psychiatrist from Palo Alto and a World War II veteran, agreed to take photographs and films of the event.

The protest began with a few speeches by the men who were beginning their fast. Afterward, friends would term Willson's speech, “prophetic.”

Murphy, 67, a volunteer ambulance driver in World War II, said Willson was determined to remain on the track.

About 11:50 a.m., Willson and several other activists approached the guard post at the Concord station gate to again deliver Willson's letter.

But when they saw the munitions train — a Navy engine and two boxcars — Duncombe said he, Willson and Murphy hurried back the quarter-mile to their position on the small section of track that crosses public property.

Willson was on the right side of the track bed; Murphy was in the middle with Duncombe on the left.

Also about 11:50 a.m., the train's air horn blasted a warning whistle and the train began rolling toward the protesters.

The train came around a small curve in the track. Skerce and others said they believed it was accel-

erating.

Five feet before the train reached the protesters, Duncombe dived off the track. Murphy grabbed the cowcatcher and hung on as it carried him down the track.

All three cars rolled over Willson. “It chopped him up like a meat grinder,” said Pierre Blais, a Vietnam veteran from San Jose.

The train severed Willson's right ankle. His left leg was mangled. His head was deeply gashed.

Gerry Condon, a former Green Beret medic, said he applied pressure to one of Willson's lower legs to stop the bleeding while Rauen applied pressure to the other. Murphy cradled Willson in his arms.

Later, friends gathered at John Muir for an all-night vigil. One protest leader said the Nicaraguan Embassy in Washington, D.C., called Wednesday to inform Willson that Rosario Murillo, the wife of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, has applied to the U.S. State Department to come to the United States and be at Willson's bedside.

Mercury News Staff Writers Stephen G. Bloom, Betty Barnacle and the Associated Press contributed to this report.