

Protests mount over maiming

6 arrested at Concord weapons site

By Kristin Huckshorn
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Six protesters were arrested Thursday near the Concord Naval Weapons Station as escalating support continued to focus national attention on the maiming of a Vietnam veteran, S. Brian Willson, by a Navy train.

The protesters, including Duncan Murphy, who was on the track with Willson on Tuesday when he was hit, were arrested while trying to block a truck that they said was carrying weapons. They were booked into the Contra Costa County Jail in Martinez and later released.

Demonstrations also were staged in Santa Cruz, Berkeley and Boston. And in Managua, Rosario Murillo, the wife of President Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua, announced late Thursday that she had been granted a visa to visit Willson at his bedside.

Willson lost both legs, his skull was fractured and one ear was partially severed when he was hit by the train as he sat on the track. Plastic surgeons reattached the ear and neurosurgeons repaired a large, deep wound to his forehead on Wednesday.

His condition was upgraded to fair Thursday and he was moved from the intensive care unit to a private room at John Muir Hospital in Walnut Creek.

"He's still in pain," hospital spokeswoman Sandra Ryan said.

Willson dictated a statement to a

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friend Thursday that read, in part: "Hopefully, we can get enough people to stop the arms shipments from Concord, and then it will spread to the rest of the country. Hopefully, no one else will have to lose their legs but maybe they will."

Navy won't say

The protesters contend that arms are being shipped from Concord to Central America. The Navy has declined to confirm or deny that contention.

Willson's wife, Holley Rauen, met Thursday afternoon at the hospital with two lawyers. Friends of Willson said that his wife was considering filing a lawsuit against the Navy or the engineer of the train that hit her husband.

"The suit would be to recover damages," said Scott Rutherford, a friend of Willson's, who added that Willson has no personal income and no health insurance.

Investigations into the incident continued Thursday. The Contra Costa County Sheriff's Department confirmed that investigators have interviewed the train's engineer, brakeman and conductor. All three are civilian employees of the Navy. The brakeman and conductor were riding on the front of the train as spotters when the impact occurred.

"We interviewed them Tuesday, we talked to some of them again and we'll talk to some again (today)," said Lt. Telford Terry, spokesman for the Sheriff's Department.

Seeking videotape

Terry said that the department still had not obtained the videotape of the incident, filmed by a protester, but hoped to acquire that tape by today and that the investigation should be completed later today or Monday. They then will pass the information to the Contra Costa County district attorney's office and prosecutors will decide if criminal charges should be filed.

The Navy refused to comment Thursday on its own investigation. Nor would it confirm if an investigating team from Washington, D.C., had arrived as scheduled.

Willson fund

Contributions toward Brian Willson's medical care are being accepted by the Mount Diablo Peace Center, 65 Eckley Lane, Walnut Creek, CA. 94596. Checks should be made out to M.D.U.U.C-BW.

In another effort to unearth what went wrong, an aide to U.S. Rep. Ron Dellums, D-Oakland, said that Dellums and fellow Bay Area representatives Barbara Boxer and George Miller likely would ask for an investigation by a subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee.

In Washington, John Lally, chief counsel of the Armed Services Committee's investigations subcommittee, said a probe into the Concord incident would be unusual. But he said the decision to proceed would come from Rep. Bill Nichols, D-Alabama, the subcommittee chairman. Nichols couldn't be reached for comment.

Controversy over the incident has focused on how fast the train was moving when it hit Willson. The Navy has said that the train was not moving unusually fast — about 5 mph. But San Francisco television station KGO (Ch. 7) said this week that analysis of the tape indicated the train was moving about 17 mph at impact.

No trains ran from the Concord station on Wednesday or Thursday. The Navy refused to say when trains might resume running.

Rally set Saturday

A rally at the track is scheduled for noon Saturday and Nicaragua's Murillo is scheduled to appear. A spokesman for Willson said Murillo was scheduled to arrive in San Francisco tonight and meet with Willson privately sometime during the weekend.

"I have to tell him his sacrifice is something that comes together with the sacrifice of thousands of Nicaraguans," Murillo said at a news conference in Managua. "We see his sacrifice as an image of love and deepest feelings of the

North American people . . ."

About 250 veterans and peace activists gathered Thursday afternoon at the Santa Cruz County Courthouse plaza. They held hands, locked arms and listened to speakers decry the Concord incident.

Veteran Steve Bare, speaking on behalf of Bill Motta Post 5888 of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, told supporters that the incident should inspire "peace-loving" people. "For while a rolling train can cripple a man," he said, "no misguided master of war can ever roll over a united, diligent and fearless quest for peace."

Calls of support and offers to donate blood and money continued to flood the switchboard at John Muir Hospital, Ryan said. She said her four-member public relations staff had been, "spending full time on this."

Protests over Willson's maiming turned violent Wednesday night in Berkeley. About 400 chanting protesters marched through the streets, breaking two windows and damaging the front door at Callaghan Hall, the headquarters of the local ROTC.

In the Boston suburb of Brookline, 15 veterans sat on a track and stopped a rapid transit train Thursday morning, shutting down a transit system line for 13 minutes before dispersing without incident. Jim Parker, a Vietnam veteran and group spokesman, said the veterans wanted to show support for Willson.

Mercury News Staff Writers Alan Gathright, Christopher Schmitt and Ellen Goodwin and the Associated Press contributed to this report.