

Peace group sets arms blockade

Will block weapons hauls at Concord naval station

By Judy Ronningen

Staff writer

CONCORD — A peace group that has been quietly demonstrating at the Concord Naval Weapons Station all summer will start blocking weapons trains and trucks next week.

The weapons blockades will coincide with a 40-day fast beginning Tuesday, involving two veterans who fasted 36 days last September on the steps of the Capitol in Washington, D.C.

The fasters and their supporters are expected to start blocking trains Tuesday morning, said David Hartsough, a protest organizer.

"I can say definitely there's going to be a good deal of blocking trains and trucks during the next month and a half," said Hartsough.

Demonstrators say they are blocking weapons movements into the waterfront area of the Concord Naval Weapons Station because they believe Concord is shipping weapons to El Salvador.

Weapons station spokesman Dan Tikalsky says he can't confirm whether or not there are shipments to Central America. But the Pledge of Resistance peace group obtained a shipping order detailing at least one shipment from Concord to El Salvador in 1985.

The Sheriff's Department does not expect large numbers of arrests and has not scheduled extra deputies, Capt. Gary Ford said.

Vietnam veteran Brian Willson, 46, of San Rafael and World War II veteran Duncan Murphy, 67, of Sulphur Springs, Ark., will try to fast for 40 days, drinking only water. Both fasted last summer in Washington to protest the U.S. shipping arms to Central America.

One to three other men may join them, and other protesters plan to fast for shorter periods.

Willson said he will fast to express his opposition to sending weapons to Central America and as a way of atoning for government policies that lead to deaths there.

"I'm serious about the fact that these weapons must stop. At least, I want to do everything I can to stop the flow of these weapons," he said.



Staff photo/Eric Rahkonen

BRIAN WILLSON plans to begin a 40-day fast at the Concord Naval Weapons Station Tuesday. His wife, Holley Rauhen, is seated in front of him.

Willson plans to get arrested on the tracks and hopes to go to trial so he can explain the group's philosophy.

The group calls itself the Nuremberg Action, based on the charter of the Nuremberg Tribunal

that tried German war criminals after World War II. The principles say that waging a war of aggression is illegal under international law, and that a person is not absolved of responsibility because he or she is following government orders.

So far, the Nuremberg Action protest has been low-key.

Unlike the massive demonstration at the Naval Weapons Station June 12 and 13, a few members of the peace group arrive daily and set up signs and banners across Port Chicago Highway from the station's front entrance. They have been in Concord since June 10.

They smile and wave at military personnel, who sometimes honk and wave back.

The protesters emphasize that they oppose the government policy and the weapons, not the people in uniform. One of their signs reads: "Respect the Navy. Question the Weapons."

At first, not all the military respected them back.

Marie Seaman, 75, said early in the protest, a vanload of military men drove by and one sailor mooned them. Civilians passing by on Port Chicago Highway threw pineapples and sweet potatoes. "But we just keep smiling and waving to 'em," she said.

Weeks later, a truckload of sailors passed by a pretty teen-age girl in cutoffs was protesting. "One of the sailors yelled 'I want to go back and join the protest,'" Seaman recalled, laughing.

"We are getting more smiles and more 'right ons,'" Seaman says. "A guy last night stopped by; he'd been going by and seeing us. He wanted to support us, so he stopped and gave us \$5."

The protest group is dug in for the long haul. They have tried to buy a house in Concord. One supporter is supplying them with an outhouse, which also serves as their "office" and a place to leave messages.

Sydney Vilen of San Bruno, whose deep tan shows she is a regular on picket duty, says their effort seems to be working because it is getting people to think about the country's role in Central America.

"We're getting some respect just for the fact that we've stayed here this long," she said. "That kind of communication, even if it's a nod or a wave or a 'V' for victory sign, that's what it's about."