

S. Brian Willson, with wife, admires new legs

Gift for protester: a new pair of legs

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CONCORD (AP) — An anti-war demonstrator who was run over by a munitions train received a new pair of artificial legs Friday, during a Christmas Day celebration at the naval weapons depot where his limbs were severed.

"Obviously, it's a very symbolic spot, for this is where the military madness ran over all of us and I happened to lose my legs," said S. Brian Willson.

The new artificial legs for Willson were brought by "Santa," played by professional clown Wavy Gravy, who arrived in a white van with a large decorated package.

Willson tried on the new legs and did a few dance steps, to the delight of the crowd.

The 46-year-old Vietnam veteran then told fellow protesters that vigils and other demonstrations would continue at the Concord Naval Weapons Station until the U.S. government stopped shipping arms to Central America.

Willson lost both legs below the knee Sept. 1 when a train slammed into him as he sat on the railroad tracks during a protest aimed at blocking the alleged shipments. Two other demonstrators on the tracks managed to get out of the way of the oncoming train.

The Christmas celebration, which was to include a potluck dinner on the tracks, was the latest in a series of regular demonstrations held at the main gate of the facility since the incident.

"This celebration talks to the fact of our dedication to peace,"

said Sydney Vilen, with Nuremberg Actions, the group that sponsored the event and the Sept. 1 protest. "We know this movement will take time to build, but this serves as a forum for people who feel helpless."

About 80 other demonstrators, some of whom have been camping at the depot and sleeping on the tracks at night, cheered Willson, who walked up to them on his current pair of artificial legs with the help of two canes. They surrounded him, shook his hand and wished him a Merry Christmas.

Willson, who wore a red St. Louis Cardinals baseball cap and jacket, praised his fellow demonstrators for "saying no to the death trains."

Willson said he was continuing his efforts to bring peace to Central America, including helping form similar protest groups across the country.

Ten people were arrested after refusing to get up from the tracks on Wednesday. The Contra Costa County Sheriff's Department said it has made more than 100 arrests at the weapons station since Willson was injured.

Opinions differ about who was to blame for the Sept. 1 incident. The Contra Costa County district attorney declined to file criminal charges against the train crew, saying there was no evidence that they intentionally rammed Willson, and blaming a series of misunderstandings for the accident.



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