



Ron Cockerille

USS Fort Fisher, which arrived off Santa Cruz last night, prepares to drop anchor off Municipal Wharf.

Navy ship arrives for SC visit

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The USS Fort Fisher glided effortlessly into Santa Cruz yesterday afternoon, creating a stir among people strolling along West Cliff Drive and the Municipal Wharf.

The Fort Fisher, an amphibious landing ship, will be in Santa Cruz until Monday as a goodwill gesture and to give the 325 crew members a short relaxation period.

Free public tours of the

ship began today and will continue hourly from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. through Sunday. Tickets are available at the wharf for each day's tours beginning at 9:30 a.m.

The tours involve climbing ladders and narrow passageways, so flat shoes and slacks are recommended. Children must be 10 or older and accompanied by a parent.

Landing craft are housed in the Fort Fisher's stern, which can be flooded to

launch and recover them.

The ship is 562 feet long, 84 feet wide and weighs more than 13,700 tons. It was commissioned in 1972 and has completed several extended deployments in the western Pacific Ocean. The captain is Commander A. James Gilbert of New Jersey.

This is the Fort Fisher's second visit to Santa Cruz; the ship's presence has sparked protests by peace groups during both stops.

Area veterans, on the other hand, have expressed their strong support of the ship's visit.

There are plans by a "peace flotilla" group to go out and meet the Navy ship Saturday morning.

Municipal Wharf superintendent Bill Eisele said he welcomes both the Navy ship and the flotilla group. "That's the good thing about Santa Cruz," he said. "Everybody is accepted and welcomed here."