

Protest blocks freeway

WAS Gulf War Demonstration

By TOM LONG

Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Within hours of the first air strike on Baghdad, thousands of protesters were marching through Santa Cruz, crying out against the war.

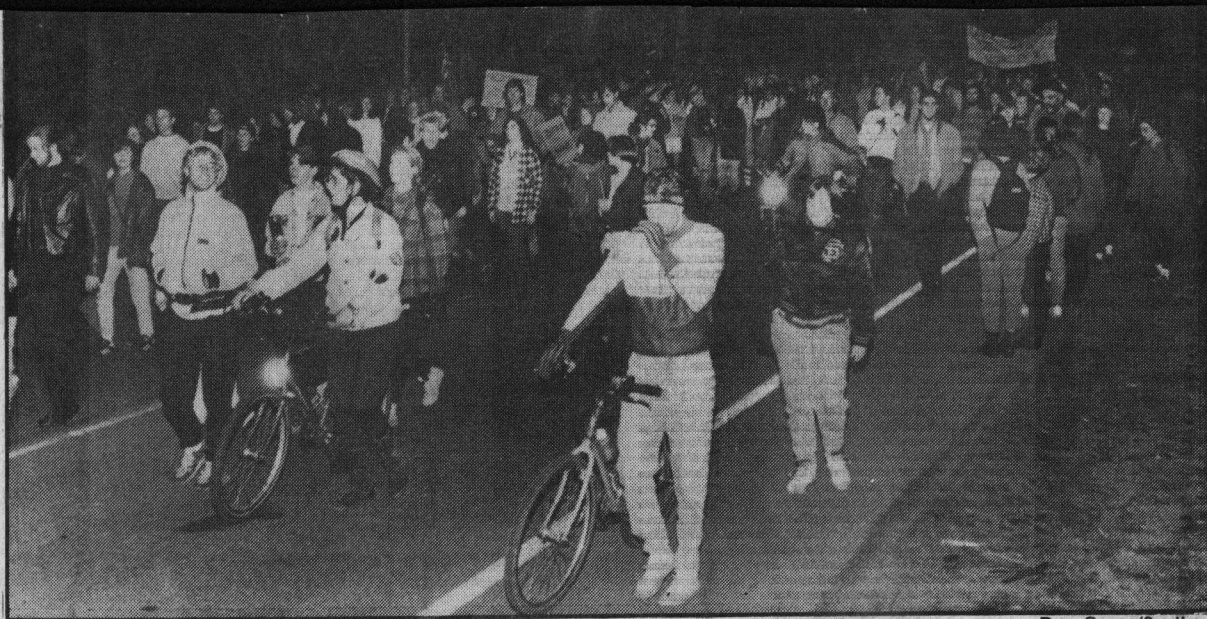
Before Wednesday night was over, the protesters, estimated by police at 3,500, interrupted traffic throughout the downtown area and closed down Highway 17 for about one hour. Their shouts and chants could be heard from Pasa-tiempo to the west side while confused drivers trying to find their way around the marchers became tangled in long lines of cars that stood still.

By night's end there were still hundreds of protesters walking in small groups along city streets, carrying signs and shouting slogans. Drivers' tempers had flared through the night, but no incidents of violence were reported and no arrests were made. And horns were still honking at times when protesters asked drivers to "Honk if you hate war."

Protesters vowed the rallies and marches against the war would continue. UC Santa Cruz is expected to be closed by a student and staff walkout today, and, throughout the night, protest organizers were announcing meeting times for more protests throughout the week.

"This will work if the government listens to the people," said 18-year-old Jeff Sanders as he stood among thousands of others blocking Highway 17 Wednesday night.

What became a nightlong series of marches and protest rallies began at UC Santa Cruz when about 2,000 students gathered at the quarry there within minutes of the first



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Thousands of demonstrators took over Highway 17 for about one hour Wednesday night.



Janiaap Dekker

Protesters stopped this car after the driver tried to get through Highway 17 blockade.

March

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reports of air strikes on Baghdad.

People wandered to the pre-determined meeting place from all corners of the campus, many tearful, others with arms around one another, some walking as if in a daze.

Charliss Scarich, 22, stood crying in the midst of the crowd while organizers of the protest march shouted out instructions to those gathered.

"I'm really scared," she said. "I know a lot of people who are my age and in the military."

At 5 p.m. a flood of students began marching down to the city, chanting anti-war slogans and carrying signs. The crowd marched down Bay Street, where more people were waiting to join in the throng.

As a crowd of more than 3,000 hit the corner of Bay and Mission streets, shop owners there began locking their doors. The crowd swarmed out onto Mission Street, stopping all traffic. For a few minutes, protesters at the front of the march sat down at the intersection. One young man climbed atop a police car with a conga drum and beat a rhythm to the chants of "Stop the war now! Stop the war now!"

The crowd continued down Mission Street, completely surrounding cars and stopping all traffic. One woman in a Jeep stuck her arm out of her car window and waved the peace sign as protesters flooded past her.

The protest had its opponents, though. A group of three young men hurled insults at the marchers on Mission Street.

"Get out of here hippies. You're lame," one yelled.

"There's a time for peace, but when it comes to war, it's time to hit them hard," Shane Bradley, a 19-year-old sheet metal worker said.

"They're not doing anything at all," he said pointing to the marchers. "It just pisses people off."

As the noisy protesters passed Cheryl King's house on Trescony Street a few blocks later, her 6-year-old daughter became hysterical with fright.

"She's screaming in terror because she thinks there's a war going on in her front yard," King said. "This is a real mess. The police tried to hold them back but there's no stopping them."

The crowd continued to gain momentum and grow as the march turned onto Laurel Street and headed downtown. By 6 p.m. the march had turned into a rally on the corner of Cathcart Street and Pacific Avenue, where the weekly Farmer's Market is held. What had begun as a gathering of UC students had become a mix from all walks of life — seniors and veterans and children and high school kids.

Some held candles, others held hands, listening to speakers talking from atop a flatbed truck. Some in the crowd climbed atop a television broadcast truck, others were perched on cars parked along the street. The smell of marijuana moved through the crowd and a few drunks yelled incoherently, but the crowd was well-behaved as speakers spoke against the war.

"It's so easy for us here in California, in Santa Cruz, to listen to speeches without thinking of the people who are already dying in this f---ing war!" one emotional woman told the crowd.

"All of us to some extent feel like we have not done enough to stop this war," City Councilman and peace activist Scott Kennedy told the crowd.

The crowd then broke into two sets of marchers, one group weaving their way around the downtown while another marched off to close down Highway 17.

By 7:30 p.m. the scene on the highway had become a circus. Protesters marched up from Ocean Street and blocked both north and southbound lanes near the fish-hook. Skateboarders zoomed back and forth in the empty fast lanes, people marched about flaunting upside-down American flags, women pushed baby carriages along, blowing bubbles in the night.

The Highway Patrol had stopped traffic near the Pasatiempo exit and at the Ocean Street entrance. One woman was reportedly hit when she stepped out in front of a motorist, but police said she was not injured and refused aid. Another man's car was damaged by protesters on the highway when he tried to drive through the blockade.

After an hour of chanting on the freeway, the protesters turned and headed back to town. As the first marchers passed beneath a freeway overpass on the way back they let out a long shriek that was carried from the beginning of the crowd to the end, hundreds of yards away.

Many of the protesters were headed back to another rally at the Farmer's Market; others just began to wander the streets and wave their signs. But the cry they let out as one echoed on.

— Staff writer John Robinson contributed to this report.