

Activists protest Navy ship

By LAURIE SLOTHOWER

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — A coalition of peace groups unleashed its Monterey Bay Peace Navy Saturday morning as part of a non-violent protest against a U.S. Navy ship visiting here.

About 15 kayaks and a dozen vessels — ranging from dinghys to sailboats — left the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor to sail around the USS Fort Fisher, anchored off the Municipal Wharf until Monday.

A private plane displaying a peace banner flew overhead.

Activists sailed around the wharf carrying anti-interventionist signs in their kayaks.

The fledgling fleet looked small next to the massive, 542-foot-wide amphibious landing ship.

From 10 a.m. to noon, members of Action Against Gunboat Diplomacy, a coalition of several peace groups, handed out leaflets and carried banners decrying U.S. policy on Nicaragua, nuclear war, defense spending and related topics.

At noon, about 100 people gathered to hear speakers and sing songs on the same subjects.

"Now that the ship is here, we have to respond, because it only shows the goodclean side of the military," said Doug Rand, an organizer from the Resource Center for Non-Violence.

Rand said the Fort Fisher is the type of vehicle used for water invasions of Latin American countries.

The ship can't really be used for defense, said Dan Miller, a combat veteran of World War II who devotes all of his post retirement time to the anti-war movement.

The USS Fort Fisher is useless against the Soviet Union and isn't really effective in the Persian Gulf, where most countries have ship to shore missiles, Miller said.

"It can only be used against smaller countries," he said.

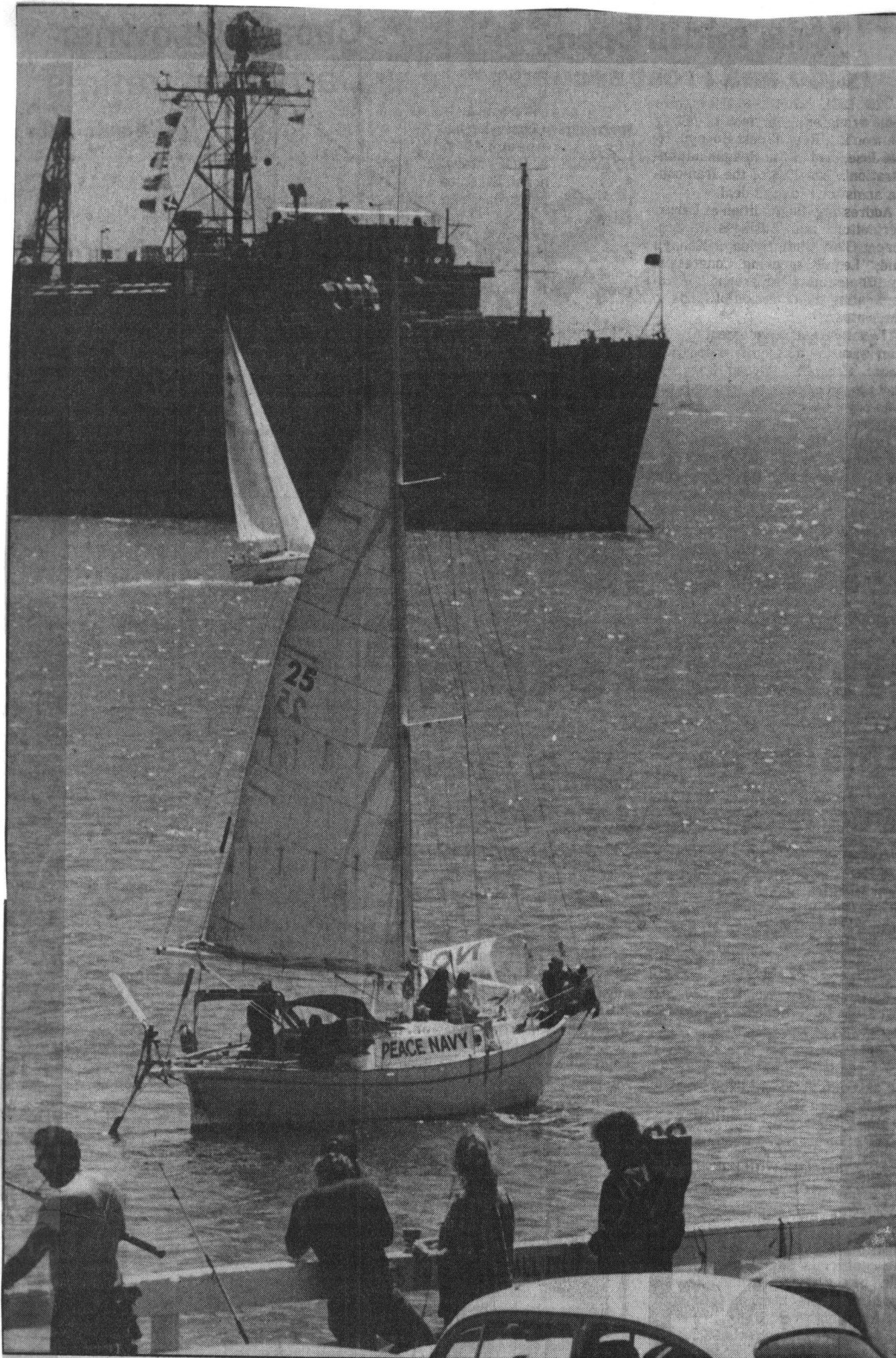
"We're not against the sailors on that boat, or even the boat, really. We're against what that boat will be used for," he added.

A Navy press release says the boat has a 325-person crew and has room for 320 troops. It was named after the Confederate stronghold Fort Fisher in North Carolina.

People waiting in line for tours were not convinced.

"I'm kind of apolitical. I just want to see the ship," said Teresa McTernan of Santa Cruz.

Tours will be every half hour from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. today.



Pete Amos/Sentinel

The 'Monterey Bay Peace Navy' protested off the Municipal Wharf Saturday.