

VCF DEMONSTRATIONS 9/4/87 (RP)

Protesters rally at SC courthouse to protest maiming of vet by train

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by his supporters.

Some 300 people gathered yesterday in front of the Santa Cruz County courthouse, to share their grief and to plan their response.

Willson, a San Rafael resi-

The maiming of Brian Willson on the railroad tracks in Concord this week is being called an "attempted murder"

dent who is an active member of the Santa Cruz Bill Motto Post 5888, was run over by a Navy munitions train at the Concord Naval Weapons Station Wednesday. He and other members of the Veterans Peace Action Team were protesting U.S. arms shipments to Central America. Three of them sat on the tracks, and the train started to move.

Robby Labovitz, who witnessed the incident, said, "All of us strongly believed it (the train) would stop."

But next thing she saw was bodies flying, she said, as people hurried to get out of the way. Everyone, that is, except Willson.

Willson, an Air Force captain during the Vietnam War, lost both legs below the knees and suffered a fractured skull. He is at John Muir Hospital in Walnut Creek, where his condition has been upgraded from "serious" to "fair."

"Brian knew well what he was doing when he knelt on those tracks," Santa Cruz Mayor Jane Weed said. "He knows well the power of the military machine."

She urged people to join in a protest of what happened to Willson.

"I think Brian has lent us one of the best ways of getting together," Weed said.

Steve Brooks, commander of the Bill Motto Post, made a plea at yesterday's rally for all veterans to join in a demonstration tomorrow at the Concord Naval Weapons Station. The group plans to continue its fight against U.S. involvement in Central America, and to show its support for Willson.

Also lending support at the rally was Santa Cruz County Supervisor Joe Cucchiara.

While others have been discussing the details of what happened, arguing over how fast the train was moving and whether Willson was run over intentionally, Cucchiara said the real issue is "that there was an attempted murder by the American government on three of its citizens."

"It humbles the soul," he said, "and at the same time it outrages the body and the mind for greater action."

He said the incident "symbolizes the same kind of maiming and death that we perpetrate" in Central America.

Former Santa Cruz mayor Bert Muhly, who has led trips to Nicaragua, said he was angry, not only at what happened to Willson, but at the U.S.'s involvement in Central America, and at what he called the lies passed along by the press.

"We have to stop the lying and misinformation that continues today," Muhly said, "even in our own local paper, the Santa Cruz Sentinel."

Muhly ripped into the Sentinel's editorial in yesterday's edition, which gave the impression Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega did not sign the recently drafted Central American peace plan. The Sentinel ran a correction of that mistake today.

"We have to straighten the information channels out so that truth will bring us together," Muhly said.

Rick Schoos, another who saw Willson run over by the train, told the crowd that Willson knew exactly what he was doing. He was not a crazy man, said Schoos, who likened Willson to Martin Luther King Jr. in his fight for what he thought was right.

The Bill Motto Post has taken up a collection to help support Willson and his family. Donations have already surpassed \$2,000.

Meanwhile, Rosario Murillo, wife of Nicaragua President Daniel Ortega, was granted a visa yesterday so she could visit Willson, who has visited Nicaragua several times and became good friends with Murillo.

Murillo's representative said she would visit Willson at the hospital.

Elaine Ellison, a San Francisco woman who has cooperated with her on various cultural projects, said Murillo would also attend a protest rally outside the Navy Weapons Station Saturday.

The Navy promised a thorough investigation of the incident, according Bay Area Congresswoman Barbara Boxer. Boxer said Thursday the Navy would study a possible policy change following the Tuesday accident. Boxer said it was premature for her to call for a Congressional inquiry, but said she would "look at the possibility of a wider investigation."



Chip Scheuer

Protester Mitchell Lus holds sign while listening to speakers at yesterday's rally at the courthouse.