

Train hits protester at weapons station

PROTESTER, from Page 1A of the resistance action on the tracks so that they will have the choice of suspending movement of munitions, removing our bodies, or running us over."

Demonstrators charged that Willson was run down intentionally. But Contra Costa County sheriff's Capt. Gary Ford said he is investigating the incident as "just a tragic accident."

Ford said the investigation initially was hampered by the train crew's refusal to be interviewed or tested for drugs or alcohol until Navy counselors arrived. They later were interviewed, and tests may be ordered, said Dan Tikalski, a spokesman for the weapons center.

"We are cooperating fully with the investigation," he said later in the day.

Base Cmdr. Lonnie Cagle said witnesses told Navy officials that some protesters jumped onto the tracks a short distance in front of the train before it struck Willson.

Tikalski said the train engineer, a civilian employee of the Navy, applied the brakes when he realized not all of the protesters would be off the tracks at a road intersection on county property adjacent to the weapons center.

He said the train was traveling at about 5 mph, but he did not know when the brakes were applied on the straight stretch of track with a visibility of several hundred feet.

"The protesters were briefed earlier in the day by the (California Highway Patrol) as well as the sheriff's office about the danger of trying to block a train and they were told it could not stop in a short distance," Tikalski said.

Ruben Gomez, senior vice commander of Bill Motta Post of the VFW in Santa Cruz, described Willson as "a man committed to

ans Peace Action Team in Santa Cruz.

He said Willson was one of four activists who last year fasted on the steps of the U.S. Capitol as a protest against Reagan administration policy in Nicaragua. Willson was in Concord to begin another protest fast at the weapons station, the largest such facility in the Western United States.

Some witnesses claimed the train, which carries munitions from their storage bunkers to ships, sped up as it approached Willson. But others told sheriff's investigators the train was traveling only about 5 mph and was braking as the crew noticed Willson wasn't moving.

John Skerce, a witness and fellow protester, said, "The train let out a blast with its whistle that was sustained throughout the action."

Willson and four other demonstrators had stretched a banner across the tracks. "As it got to the road, the train actually seemed to accelerate," Skerce said.

The two demonstrators nearest Willson managed to jump clear of the train as it neared them; Willson didn't. "He was on his knees, forced backward and then dragged ... about 25 feet," Skerce said.

"The base commander and all the authorities in the area had been informed as to what it was — a fast, a vigil and a protest. That was well understood.

"It was only in the last few seconds that they realized the train was going to run them over. They went out there with the understanding they were putting their lives on the line," Skerce said.

"They knew what the possible risks were."

"I'm just totally outraged," said Chuck Goodmacher, a veterans group spokesman. "There's no jus-



©1987 Oakland Tribune/Marie Felde via Associated Press

Gabriel Rauen, 14, has just seen his stepfather, S. Brian Willson, hit by train

been notified. There was no reason for them not to stop. The military personnel showed no concern for these people."

In Santa Cruz on Tuesday night, a coalition of veterans' and peace groups of which Willson was a member or had founded called for a major rally at noon Thursday at the Santa Cruz County Courthouse, and another major demonstration against the Reagan administration's Central America policy at the weapons station Saturday.

Harry Meserve, VPAT coordinator, said the Navy had been told two weeks ago and again on Tuesday that the demonstrators intended to block the tracks peacefully and would not leave voluntarily but would not resist arrest.

Meserve suggested that the train crew engaged in a game of chicken with the demonstrators, showing "a total disregard for human life."

"It's very clear that somebody

scare the hell out of these veterans, these demonstrators," Meserve said.

Willson was an Air Force lieutenant serving as an intelligence officer in Vietnam from 1966 to 1970, according to a biographical sketch on file at the Mount Diablo Peace Center in Concord.

Mercury News Staff Writer Lee Quarnstrom contributed to this report.

Navigation and document control icons and labels:

- Top right: B4/B5, A3/A4
- Left side (top to bottom): 1, 2, 2, A3, B4, 123, A4, B5, B4/B5, A3/A4
- Bottom right: SPETK

Train hits protester at weapons station

PROTESTER, from Page 1A of the resistance action on the tracks so that they will have the choice of suspending movement of munitions, removing our bodies, or running us over."

Demonstrators charged that Willson was run down intentionally. But Contra Costa County sheriff's Capt. Gary Ford said he is investigating the incident as "just a tragic accident."

Ford said the investigation initially was hampered by the train crew's refusal to be interviewed or tested for drugs or alcohol until Navy counselors arrived. They later were interviewed, and tests may be ordered, said Dan Tikalski, a spokesman for the weapons center.

"We are cooperating fully with the investigation," he said later in the day.

Base Cmdr. Lonnie Cagle said witnesses told Navy officials that some protesters jumped onto the tracks a short distance in front of the train before it struck Willson.

Tikalski said the train engineer, a civilian employee of the Navy, applied the brakes when he realized not all of the protesters would be off the tracks at a road intersection on county property adjacent to the weapons center.

He said the train was traveling at about 5 mph, but he did not know when the brakes were applied on the straight stretch of track with a visibility of several hundred feet.

"The protesters were briefed earlier in the day by the (California Highway Patrol) as well as the sheriff's office about the danger of trying to block a train and they were told it could not stop in a short distance," Tikalski said.

Ruben Gomez, senior vice commander of Bill Motta Post of the VFW in Santa Cruz, described Willson as "a man committed to peace" who worked with the Veter-

ans Peace Action Team in Santa Cruz.

He said Willson was one of four activists who last year fasted on the steps of the U.S. Capitol as a protest against Reagan administration policy in Nicaragua. Willson was in Concord to begin another protest fast at the weapons station, the largest such facility in the Western United States.

Some witnesses claimed the train, which carries munitions from their storage bunkers to ships, sped up as it approached Willson. But others told sheriff's investigators the train was traveling only about 5 mph and was braking as the crew noticed Willson wasn't moving.

John Skerce, a witness and fellow protester, said, "The train let out a blast with its whistle that was sustained throughout the action."

Willson and four other demonstrators had stretched a banner across the tracks. "As it got to the road, the train actually seemed to accelerate," Skerce said.

The two demonstrators nearest Willson managed to jump clear of the train as it neared them; Willson didn't. "He was on his knees, forced backward and then dragged ... about 25 feet," Skerce said.

"The base commander and all the authorities in the area had been informed as to what it was — a fast, a vigil and a protest. That was well understood.

"It was only in the last few seconds that they realized the train was going to run them over. They went out there with the understanding they were putting their lives on the line," Skerce said.

"They knew what the possible risks were."

"I'm just totally outraged," said Chuck Goodmacher, a veterans group spokesman. "There's no justification for this. The Navy had



©1987 Oakland Tribune/Marie Felde via Associated Press

Gabriel Rauén, 14, has just seen his stepfather, S. Brian Willson, hit by train

been notified. There was no reason for them not to stop. The military personnel showed no concern for these people."

In Santa Cruz on Tuesday night, a coalition of veterans' and peace groups of which Willson was a member or had founded called for a major rally at noon Thursday at the Santa Cruz County Courthouse, and another major demonstration against the Reagan administration's Central America policy at the weapons station Saturday.

Harry Meserve, VPAT coordinator, said the Navy had been told two weeks ago and again on Tuesday that the demonstrators intended to block the tracks peacefully and would not leave voluntarily but would not resist arrest.

Meserve suggested that the train crew engaged in a game of chicken with the demonstrators, showing "a total disregard for human life."

"It's very clear that somebody decided that they were going to

scare the hell out of these veterans, these demonstrators," Meserve said.

Willson was an Air Force lieutenant serving as an intelligence officer in Vietnam from 1966 to 1970, according to a biographical sketch on file at the Mount Diablo Peace Center in Concord.

Mercury News Staff Writer Lee Quarnstrom contributed to this report.

A3/A4
B4/B5
A3 B4
A4 B5
B4/B5
A3/A4

Train hits protester at weapons station

PROTESTER, from Page 1A of the resistance action on the tracks so that they will have the choice of suspending movement of munitions, removing our bodies, or running us over."

Demonstrators charged that Willson was run down intentionally. But Contra Costa County sheriff's Capt. Gary Ford said he is investigating the incident as "just a tragic accident."

Ford said the investigation initially was hampered by the train crew's refusal to be interviewed or tested for drugs or alcohol until Navy counselors arrived. They later were interviewed, and tests may be ordered, said Dan Tikalski, a spokesman for the weapons center.

"We are cooperating fully with the investigation," he said later in the day.

Base Cmdr. Lonnie Cagle said witnesses told Navy officials that some protesters jumped onto the tracks a short distance in front of the train before it struck Willson.

Tikalski said the train engineer, a civilian employee of the Navy, applied the brakes when he realized not all of the protesters would be off the tracks at a road intersection on county property adjacent to the weapons center.

He said the train was traveling at about 5 mph, but he did not know when the brakes were applied on the straight stretch of track with a visibility of several hundred feet.

"The protesters were briefed earlier in the day by the (California Highway Patrol) as well as the sheriff's office about the danger of trying to block a train and they were told it could not stop in a short distance," Tikalski said.

Ruben Gomez, senior vice commander of Bill Motta Post of the VFW in Santa Cruz, described Willson as "a man committed to

ans Peace Action Team in Santa Cruz.

He said Willson was one of four activists who last year fasted on the steps of the U.S. Capitol as a protest against Reagan administration policy in Nicaragua. Willson was in Concord to begin another protest fast at the weapons station, the largest such facility in the Western United States.

Some witnesses claimed the train, which carries munitions from their storage bunkers to ships, sped up as it approached Willson. But others told sheriff's investigators the train was traveling only about 5 mph and was braking as the crew noticed Willson wasn't moving.

John Skerce, a witness and fellow protester, said, "The train let out a blast with its whistle that was sustained throughout the action."

Willson and four other demonstrators had stretched a banner across the tracks. "As it got to the road, the train actually seemed to accelerate," Skerce said.

The two demonstrators nearest Willson managed to jump clear of the train as it neared them; Willson didn't. "He was on his knees, forced backward and then dragged . . . about 25 feet," Skerce said.

"The base commander and all the authorities in the area had been informed as to what it was — a fast, a vigil and a protest. That was well understood.

"It was only in the last few seconds that they realized the train was going to run them over. They went out there with the understanding they were putting their lives on the line," Skerce said.

"They knew what the possible risks were."

"I'm just totally outraged," said Chuck Goodmacher, a veterans group spokesman. "There's no jus-



©1987 Oakland Tribune/Marie Felde via Associated Press

Gabriel Rauen, 14, has just seen his stepfather, S. Brian Willson, hit by train

been notified. There was no reason for them not to stop. The military personnel showed no concern for these people."

In Santa Cruz on Tuesday night, a coalition of veterans' and peace groups of which Willson was a member or had founded called for a major rally at noon Thursday at the Santa Cruz County Courthouse, and another major demonstration against the Reagan administration's Central America policy at

Harry Meserve, VPAT coordinator, said the Navy had been told two weeks ago and again on Tuesday that the demonstrators intended to block the tracks peacefully and would not leave voluntarily but would not resist arrest.

Meserve suggested that the train crew engaged in a game of chicken with the demonstrators, showing "a total disregard for human life."

"It's very clear that somebody

scare the hell out of these veterans, these demonstrators," Meserve said.

Willson was an Air Force lieutenant serving as an intelligence officer in Vietnam from 1966 to 1970, according to a biographical sketch on file at the Mount Diablo Peace Center in Concord.

Mercury News Staff Writer Lee Quarnstrom contributed to this re-