

# 1987-09-02 Train Hits, Severely Injures Protester at Navy Base - LA Times

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An anti-war activist, hoping to halt arms shipments to the Nicaraguan *contras*, was critically injured Tuesday when he was dragged 25 feet by a military train leaving the Concord Naval Weapons Center.

S. Brian Willson, 45, beginning what was to be a 40-day fast, was sitting on the railroad tracks outside the base in the East Bay suburb when the train pulling two boxcars left shortly before noon.

A videotape of the incident, taken by one of the demonstrators and aired on KRON-TV, showed Willson, bearded and wearing a cap, sitting on the track along with others. The train sounded its whistle as it left the base, heading toward the protesters. Willson seemingly tried to move but was too late.

"They've killed my dad. They've murdered my dad," Willson's teen-age son was heard shouting on the videotape.

The side of Willson's head was smashed in the incident, and he was in surgery for most of the afternoon. His right leg was severed, said Sandra Ryan, spokeswoman at John Muir Memorial Hospital in Walnut Creek where Willson was being treated.

In a press conference before the incident, Willson explained that the weapons would be used to kill people "like you and me." He said he concluded that the lives of Central Americans were no less important than his and reasoned, "I have to say: you cannot move these weapons without moving my body."

Others of the 30 to 40 protesters were able to step aside, although a second demonstrator, Duncan Murphy, 66, received minor injuries and declined medical treatment. The train crew remained on the naval base and was not made available to Contra Costa County Sheriff's Department deputies investigating the incident until late in the afternoon.

"They tried to stop, but traveling at 5 m.p.h. it's going to take 150 or 200 feet to stop," said Dan Tikalsky, public affairs officer for the naval station.

Protesters said the train was going 20 m.p.h. and needed 500 to 1,000 feet to stop.

Although the protesters believed that the weapons aboard the train were bound for Central America, Tikalsky said the train was simply moving the explosives from one side of the base to another.

According to an announcement by Willson before Tuesday's incident, he and Murphy were to have started a 40-day fast in front of the weapons station, which supplied the majority of equipment for the Vietnam War and is said to be a main depot for weapons to Central America and the *contras* of Nicaragua.

Willson and Murphy spent time in Nicaragua this year, walking the war zones and chronicling the activities of the *contras*. Willson, a Vietnam veteran and lawyer, has long been a participant in peace demonstrations and was involved in a fast last year in Washington, associates said. Willson was representing the Veterans Peace Action Team.

The protest has been going on throughout the summer at the weapons station and involves several groups under the umbrella of an organization called Nuremburg Action that opposes U.S. involvement in Central America.

"Several vigilers were on the tracks. The train didn't even slow. It literally ran right over them. It didn't stop until it had completely cleared the area," said Chuck Goodmacher, a coordinator of the protest from Mount Diablo Peace Center.

“Military authorities were notified last week, a week ago, that people were going to be on the tracks blocking it.”

Protesters also told an officer at the base of their intent to block the train Tuesday, he said.

“I saw a train approaching and then I heard screams. I realized something ghastly had occurred,” said Bob Bovard, a retired public relations officer. “ . . . It was obvious that the injuries were extremely critical”

Capt. Gary Ford of the Contra Costa Sheriff’s Department said he “very seriously” doubted that it was a suicide attempt. But he remained puzzled by the event.