

REGIONAL

Californians rally during day of anti-war outcry

(AP) — Thousands of Californians from young mothers to World War II combat veterans retraced the faded footprints of 1960s demonstrators Saturday in marches against U.S. entry into armed conflict in the Middle East.

A solemn procession to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in San Francisco was one of hundreds of protests around the state, including the occupation of a congressman's office in Los Angeles and sober discussions in sanctuaries and synagogues.

"They say this won't be another Vietnam. No it won't - it will be worse," said Vietnam veteran Sheldon Ramsdell, at a protest at the National Cemetery on the U.S. Army Presidio in San Francisco.

As a divided U.S. House and Senate voted narrowly to authorize war on Iraq, about 150 people planted flowers beneath a Vietnam memorial thanking the men and women who died for sacrificing their "youth ... and expectations" and vowing: "We will never forget you."

A silent procession through mist shrouding the graveyard was led by four elderly World War II combat soldiers who walked with measured steps, their knees bent with age, unlike the young leaders of the 60s protests.

"I've seen a lot of it, and war is not the solution. After Vietnam I retired from the military because I could see something was not going right. I want to pay homage today to Vietnam veterans," said Lloyd Perry, 72, who saw combat in Europe and North Africa.

Protests also took place in small towns, including Fort Bragg, Mendocino, Anderson Valley, Covelo, Willits, Laytonville, Albion, Elk and Point Arena, many of which have never had a peace protest.

For hundreds, their most political act before Saturday was voting.

At a march in Chico, Vietnam veteran David Boyer shouted, "Shame on you, George Bush, you war pig."

About 1,500 people marched downtown and gathered across from City Hall, where they displayed a "body bag" to be filled with letters to President Bush.

In Los Angeles, several thousand anti-war demonstrators shouted slogans and honked car horns during a rally outside the federal building in the Westwood neighborhood.

Vietnam-era peace activist William Kunstler told protesters the Bush administration was driven by "illegal, unconstitutional, immoral and inde-

cent desires."

"We are the bombers and destroyers of the two last decades of the 20th century, not the keepers of the peace," Kunstler said.

Vietnam-era activist, Ron Kovic, told the crowd they should be willing to go to jail to prevent war. Kovic chronicled his war experience in the book "Born on the Fourth of July," which was later made into a motion picture.

"We will not let Bush kill and maim our young men and women. We will have no more Vietnams," said Kovic, whose war injuries left him in a wheelchair.

Among the demonstrators were members of the conservative John Birch Society, which opposes the military action.

"American blood should not be used to guarantee oil shipments for anyone, especially

Japanese and Western Europeans who are far more dependent on Middle East oil than Americans," Kevin Bearly, spokesman for local chapters of society, said in a news release.

At one point, anti-war demonstrators locked hands and circled a group of about 50 people who shouted support for Bush's policies. Police said there was no violence and no arrests. Advocates of military action were scheduled to take the podium later Saturday.

About half a dozen protesters continued to occupy the offices of U.S. Rep. Mel Levine, D-Los Angeles, in opposition to his support for military action in the Persian Gulf. The sit-in began Friday.

Organizer Jerry Rubin, who is not related to the former Chicago Seven defendant by the same name, said the group would remain until Congress

voted on a resolution authorizing military action.

"We are trying to convince people that there is still time for a peaceful resolution," Rubin said.

In Garden Grove, Evangelist Robert Schuller said the Crystal Cathedral church would be open 24 hours a day to comfort worshippers "as the world teeters on the brink of war."

About 800 people gathered at the Disneyland Hotel in Anaheim for an interdenominational prayer service for peace in conjunction with similar services across the United States and abroad, said event organizer Ed Steele.

"We prayed for the president, for the Congress ..., for the military personnel in the gulf and for national and international leaders," said Steele, a board member of the Redeem America religious organization.

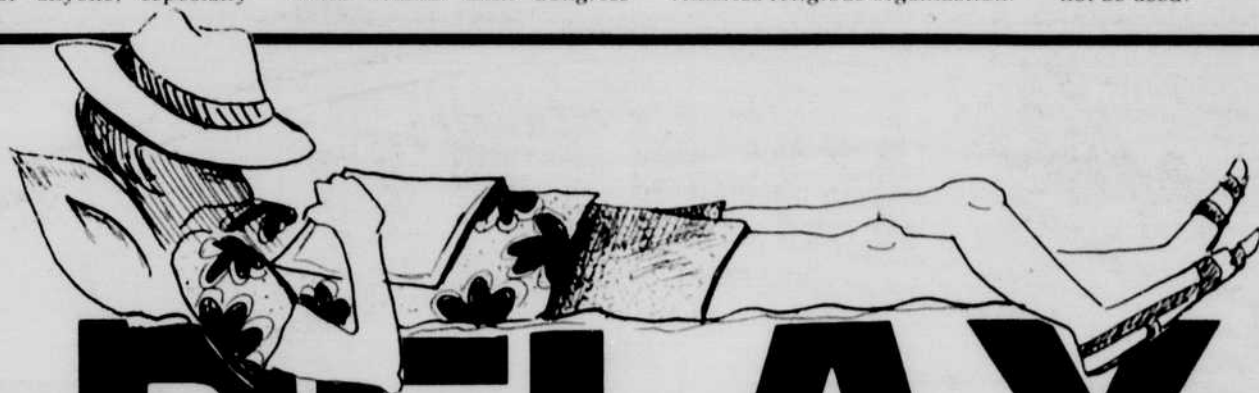
"It was serious but very, very hopeful," he said.

Elsewhere in Northern California, about 150 people gathered at University of the Pacific, in Stockton, for a teach-in that included professors, veterans and anti-war groups.

Charles Covis, a Marine who fought at Iwo Jima during World War II, said no war is quick. Military experts said Iwo Jima would be taken in two days, but the battle lasted 32 days, he said.

About 2,000 demonstrators marched to the County Courthouse Square in Santa Rosa, where organizers said the crowd swelled after the Congressional vote for war.

"That seemed to definitely motivate a lot more people to take to the streets," said a spokesman for Sonoma Action Group who asked that his name not be used.



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