

# VETERANS VFW settlement runs into trouble

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SANTA CRUZ — An out-of-court compromise reinstating the maverick Santa Cruz Veterans of Foreign Wars post may fall through.

Post 5888 Cmdr. Richard Anderson today said the deal — which specified that members of the group may speak out as individual VFW members, but must keep quiet as a post — must be ratified by post members tonight. Currently, the ranks are split.

Some of the local veterans have bitterly

dissented from the settlement, saying when Anderson promised not to publicly oppose official VFW policy, he surrendered the very point they had sued to defend.

Post 5888 had been suspended from the national veterans organization for breaking ranks and opposing U.S. policy in Nicaragua.

The agreement was hammered out after a day in court Monday and a morning of negotiations in the Holiday Inn Tuesday between local, state and national VFW officials.

If it is rejected by members, the suit could end up back in court.

"He got fooled," said post member Dean Metcalf Tuesday. Metcalf, one of the authors of a resolution which landed the group in hot water and in the media spotlight, said, "We can't speak out as a post and that's what we were here (in court) for. That's what this was all about."

In an brief, angry exchange on the courthouse steps after an official press conference had ended, Anderson told Metcalf, "If you don't like it, you can vote me out as commander and run the post yourself."

This morning, Anderson said, "I think I'm the one chopping the wood, and (the dissenters) are the ones getting warm by the fire." "We probably reached the best possible agreement. Even if everything had gone our way in court, then they (the national organization) would have immediately issued a special order prohibiting us from doing what we're allowed to do under the settlement.

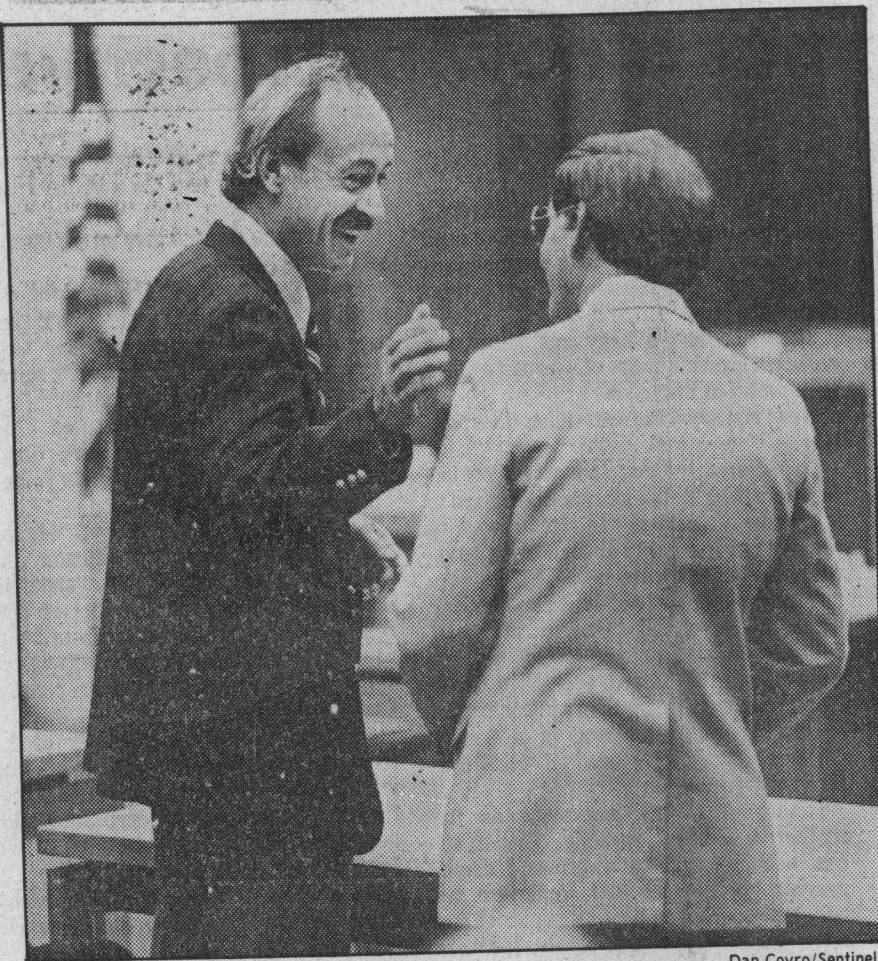
"We got our charter back and we can continue to fight for change within the organization. Chairman Mao said, 'That which is hothouse grown is not healthy.'

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# VFW compromise

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Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Anderson, left, and Cameron chat in courtroom.

You can't have instant change. It takes time."

In exchange for the promise from the post, national VFW Commander-in-Chief Billy Ray Cameron pledged to retract in national and state VFW magazines and The Sentinel statements made that linked the post to the Sandinista government.

He also promised the post seats on two key committees at the national VFW convention in Dallas this summer — the foreign affairs and bylaws committees. He promised an all-expense-paid trip to the convention for two committee members elected by the post. All disciplinary proceedings against the post were withdrawn.

The post had asked for a cash settlement for legal fees, but that demand was rejected.

The Bill Motto VFW Post 5888, chartered with less than 30 members in 1983, approved a resolution in April 1984 supporting "self-determination" and "non-intervention" in Central America. The national organization staunchly supports intervention to fight communism in Latin America.

The post's resolution was defeated at the state convention, but it was reaffirmed by the group. The post then voted to send a copy to Nicaragua with member Bill Watkins when he took a tour to Central America arranged by activist Abbie Hoffman. There, Watkins presented the resolution to the Sandinista government. Watkins said that, contrary to press reports, he was scheduled to, but did not give, the resolution to Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega.

Officers of the 2.2 million-member national organization revoked the post's charter, saying it had broken written and unwritten rules.

The local post sued for reinstatement, saying it had broken no rules. After the action, membership in the post swelled from 67 to more than 150, including World War II and Korean War vets. Bill Motto Post caps and T-shirts showed up around town on men and women, young and old.

The question of whether the post was



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VFW Commander in Chief Billy Ray Cameron, left, with Post 5888 Cmdr. Richard Anderson

right or wrong was not addressed in the out-of-court negotiations between Cameron, Anderson and other VFW officers.

At a press conference Tuesday afternoon, Cameron read a statement which said each side recognizes the other has "acted in good faith ... and (will) put this matter behind them and work together amicably..."

He stated the VFW "acknowledges and encourages the rights of its members to express their feelings as individual members... Post 5888 agrees to refrain from stating positions as a post contrary to the lawful orders and resolutions adopted by the national convention" of the VFW.

Local attorney Eric Schenk joined

Anderson in calling the deal "a significant victory" Tuesday.

But Watkins said, "We lost. My whole trip was completely wasted. We can no longer make statements as a post. They won. This whole thing is an abortion."

Metcalf said, "The only power we have,

is the good old American power to bring issues before the public, and we just lost that."

But post member Harry Dean said, "We're the VFW, not a political group. If they want to oppose war, they can join the Coalition for Nicaragua. We're here to help vets, not stop wars."