

^{VETERANS} Two years after death, veteran wins his fight

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SANTA CRUZ — Bill Motto has won his final battle.

The Vietnam veteran who won four Bronze Medals with Oak Leaf clusters and was wounded three times while saving lives as a paramedic, has posthumously been awarded veterans' benefits.

They will go to his mother, Betty Payne of Rowland Heights, who carried on his battle with the Veterans Administration after her son died of a heart ailment in Santa Cruz in 1982 at the age of 32.

In commemoration of his courage in war and against war as an activist here, local VFW Post 5888 that formed in 1983 named itself "The Bill Motto Post."

The post in essence has carried on Motto's fight. Recently it declared it was against U.S. intervention in Central America was suspended for 60 days by the national VFW while "an investigation" is conducted.

Of their fallen comrade, local veterans say that the stress of waging bureaucratic war with the administration and a denial of benefits two days before his heart attack were the direct causes of his death.

Santa Cruz Veterans Outreach counselor or Robert Lee Shippen said this morning, "The cogs of the administrative process are so sluggish, it exacerbated his problem; it caused him stress and he died."

When the announcement that benefits had finally been approved were made at a Tuesday night meeting of local vets, there was loud cheering.

From Rowland Heights in Southern California, his mother told a reporter over the phone, "My son has finally won at last. What he believed in, what he felt — he's won."

She said that the extent of benefits had not been disclosed to her.

Sandy Mullen, a secretary in the Washington D.C. office of the Veterans Administration said that type of information could not be disclosed by the government. She did confirm that the appeals board had approved the claim.

The payments are expected to be paid retroactively from the time he filed his claim — about 10 years ago.

Motto was a native Californian who did two tours of combat duty as a paramedic.

When he came out of the service and moved to Santa Cruz, he became a strong and outspoken critic of the Vietnam War.

About 10 years ago, he filed a claim saying he had suffered post-traumatic stress and that his experiences in combat zones had worsened his childhood heart condition.

His claim was denied in 1982.

However, his mother continued to fight, saying her son had continued his struggle as a matter of principle, and that was what she was doing.

Motto's comrades here also went to appeals hearings and testified on his behalf.

"The officer at the veterans office in San Francisco said that some other boys with claims may have it easier now. He said that when their claims are reviewed, they will look at my son's claim when making a decision. It will be a precedent," said Payne.

Meanwhile, the post named after Motto is under investigation and national VFW Commander Billy Ray Cameron is coming to Santa Cruz Feb. 20 to have a look for himself.

The post was suspended after its members wrote a letter to Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortego telling him they opposed U.S. intervention in Central America and they believe that President Reagan's policies were worsening the situation in Central America.

Post 5888 Cmdr. Richard Anderson and other members say they never intended to show support for Ortega's Sandinista regime, but are in opposition to Reagan's foreign policy in Central America.

The national VFW said the local post may have broken VFW policy in showing opposition to the VFW's strong support of Reagan's actions in Central America.

Motto's mother, who runs a home for retarded and abused children in Rowland Heights, will be in Santa Cruz to talk to the national commander.

The Veterans Administration approved the claim on Dec. 5, secretary Mullen said, but Payne was not notified until yesterday.

"We sent the notice to the wrong address," the secretary said. "Apparently at some time Mrs. Payne moved and we didn't have it on our records."