

Veterans

Battle Continues Over Use Of Veterans Building

BY DON RIGHETTI
Sentinel Staff Writer

Established veterans groups welcomed a contingent of their younger brethren with fixed bayonets at Tuesday's meeting of the board of supervisors.

The older groups — Disabled American Veterans, United Veterans Council, American Legion — indicated they think the younger group — Veterans Co - op — will engage in activities unsuitable to be headquartered in the Santa Cruz Veterans Memorial Building.

Supervisors disagreed with that reasoning but held up any

SC Plan Budget Held Up

BY BILL NEUBAUER
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The earmarking of \$100,000 for possible city housing advisory committee projects

decision to allow the co - op to use the building until the group's credentials have been checked further.

The co - op first went to the memorial building's board of trustees — a group made up of members of older veteran organizations — and was turned down on its request for space in the building.

The co - op then took its case to the supervisors and they agreed to investigate the situation. A series of meetings followed, and a letter to supervisors from County Administrative Officer Ted Durkee indicated at Tuesday's meeting that the older vets now are willing to accept the co - op.

But it didn't turn out that way at all.

Robert Wygant, speaking both for the building trustees and the veterans council, said the trustees have made no recommendation to accept the co - op, and if action is taken to allow the Vietnam era vets to use the building it will have to come from the board of supervisors.

Sentinel

Wednesday, June 12, 1974

Page 13

Supervisors Chairman Dale Dawson wanted to know what it would take to satisfy the trustees that the co - op is a legitimate veterans group.

Wygant answered that the co - op is a coalition of members of vets clubs at Cabrillo College and UCSC and Vietnam Veterans Against the War and the Winter Soldiers Organization. He said the co - op should furnish copies of the by - laws of those groups as well as its own by - laws showing the duly constituted election of officers.

'We don't want them if they say they won't work with us — that they're the only ones

capable of accomplishing anything," Wygant declared.

Neither, he continued, do the established veterans groups want any truck with an organization that fosters the image of the Vietnam veteran as a drug user in need of counseling and psychiatric help.

Help programs for veteran drug users and those in need of psychiatric counseling are on the co - op's work list.

The Rev. Ed Muegge of the local chapter of Disabled American Veterans was even stronger in his condemnation of the co - op group. He asked supervisors to turn down his request with a flat "no" vote.

"This doesn't involve just the

use of the building." Muegge insisted. "It sets a pattern."

He said opening the door to the co - op would harm the efforts of other veterans groups, the ones "who are doing the job and helping other veterans."

Dawson asked him if he would remain opposed to the co - op even if all its members were honorably discharged.

Muegge said "yes."

Dick Mobley, commander of the Santa Cruz Post of the American Legion, said his own organization, active here for more than 50 years, has only a "cubby hole" for its own activities in the building.

"Now here comes a group demanding the front office and to hell with the rest of us," he declared. "We don't approve of it."

John Onda, spokesman for the co - op, didn't argue directly the right of his organization to use the building. He merely described the co - op's programs — increased financial and educational benefits for veterans, drug counseling and therapy and assistance in

obtaining reviews of less than honorable discharges.

Supervisor Henry Mello mentioned he had read there are 6.8 million Vietnam era veterans "and that's a lot of people to overlook."

If the current veterans building is overcrowded, maybe the county should look into building another one, he suggested.

Supervisor Phil Harry noted that the state code limits use of public veterans buildings to organizations whose members all have been honorably discharged.

Although Onda maintained all members of the co - op are honorably discharged, supervisors noted that some of its member organizations may accept veterans with other than honorable releases from service.

If such is the case, Harry noted, "I don't see how we can recognize them."

The board held off any decision on the use of the building for two weeks while it investigates the situation.