

Rebel Post 5888 takes VFW to court over ouster order

□ Local commander digs in —

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SANTA CRUZ — The national Veterans of Foreign Wars organization will have to prove in court here that it has the authority to revoke the charter of Santa Cruz Post 5888 for taking a stand against national VFW policy that supports U.S. intervention in Central America.

Superior Court Judge Donald May this morning set 9 a.m. April 18 as the date of the hearing. At that time, the national VFW will have to show that its bylaws were violated by the local post or its revocation order will be rescinded.

In the interval, Post 5888's charter is revoked, but its attorney Eric Schenk said he expects the national VFW will take no actions to divest the local post of its funds or property until after the hearing.

It is expected, attorneys say, that the local court's ruling will be appealed.

The charter was revoked by national Commander-in-Chief Billy Ray Cameron following a 60-day suspension after Post 5888 in December took its resolution calling for the U.S. to get out of Central America to Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega.

Post 5888 Cmdr. Richard Anderson said his group does not support Nicaragua's Sandinista government, but wants Central

American officials to know that there's "at least one VFW post that supports self-determination for Central America."

The action of Post 5888, also known as the "Bill Motto Post" in memory of a local Vietnam veteran and anti-war activist, infuriated many veterans and pressure was put on national headquarters to take disciplinary action.

Many veterans let it be known they felt Post 5888's resolution and delivery to Ortega was an act equal to Jane Fonda's visit to North Vietnam during that conflict.

Some members of the local post refer to themselves jokingly as "Fonda-ites," the wife of one member said.

When the news of Post 5888's message to Ortega hit the news, Cameron issued a 60-day suspension with the promise the charter would be revoked if the Santa Cruz

post could not convince him otherwise.

Two meetings were set up with Cameron, but he failed to show for either. Post 5888 wrote a letter of appeal, but saying, "We of the Bill Motto Post dissent from national policy and think it is our right and duty to do so."

In his revocation order, Cameron simply said, "Your post has not been rehabilitated."

The national VFW insists it has the right to drum out a post that publicly dissents from national policy.

Post 5888 attorney Schenk argues the bylaws do not allow a revocation on that basis.

Anderson and the 67 members of the post insist it is a constitutional issue of free speech. They say they fought and bled for that right on behalf of their country.