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# VFW Won't Back Down On Nicaragua

LOCAL members of Veterans of Foreign Wars Bill Motto Post 5888 have been in hot water since taking a stand last month against U.S. intervention in Central America, but, said post commander Richard Anderson, "the democratic process, which we have all fought to defend, guarantees freedom of speech."

Anderson believes his post has a right to express a minority opinion within the national organization and be able to make that opinion public. His belief, however, has resulted in a 60-day suspension from the national organization; a suspension which will be discussed Wednesday when VFW National Commander Billy Ray Cameron arrives in town.

Despite knowledge of Cameron's pending visit, the local VFW post voted last week not to change its position. Members, however, hope a reconciliation can be worked out. If

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not, Anderson said the local post may consider legal actions against the national organization.

The ruckus over the post's stance, which runs against VFW national policy, began last December when a member of 5888 delivered a letter to Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega that called for "a policy of self-

determination and non-intervention in Central America."

Since then, Anderson said applications for memberships to the post, named after a deceased Vietnam veteran, have skyrocketed. "We have received about 30 applications from people across the nation who want to join 5888," Anderson said. "In addition to the applications we have received hundreds of letters from groups and individuals which are the

equivalent to a million people. They have all told us we're doing the right thing."

At its meeting last week, four local World War II vets, who had never been active members of a VFW post, joined post 5888. "I joined because this group has got the guts to stand up to the national committee on a situation which I believe is totally unconstitutional," said Ernie Faitos. "I'm proud of what they're doing, and I'm proud to be a part of the organization."

The policies of the VFW, which has a national membership of two million, are determined at annual conventions. Individual posts are not allowed to adopt positions which oppose the national rulings.

At its convention last summer in Chicago, the VFW voted to support "the restoration of American primacy in Central America, the Caribbean and South America." The year before, the group took a stronger stance, voting to urge members to send money to U.S.-backed mercenaries fighting to topple the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

With a membership of approximately 50, the Santa Cruz post attempted last spring to change the national policy on Central America. They passed a resolution which called for "a policy of self-determination and non-intervention in Central

America." Last June the resolution was submitted to the state convention in Redding where it was voted down.

Undaunted, the group decided that it had a right to disagree with the national policy. In December, post member Bill Watkins announced he was going to Nicaragua, and the group voted to have him take the resolution to Oretaga. A month later National Cmdr. Cameron put 5888 on suspension.

"Post 5888 must show cause why their charter should not be cancelled, and so far we have received no official explanation," said VFW Adjutant General Howard Vander Clute from the Kansas City headquarters. "Cmdr. Cameron may meet with them, but to clear this matter they must explain their actions to the state headquarters first, and then make a request to be heard at the national level." Vander Clute added that Cameron's trip to Santa Cruz had been planned before the group was put on suspension.

Should 5888 loose its charter, Rubin Gomez, the post Chaplin, said they would continue as a private organization. "Many of our members served in Vietnam, and they see a lot of similarities between there and Central America," he said. "If our action helps to stop the war in Nicaragua, then the guys who died in Vietnam will not have died in vain." •