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Notes On U.S. War Veterans Protesting Reagan Administration Policy In Central America

by Deborah Tyroler

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Oct. 7: At a ceremony in San Francisco, Vietnam war veteran Brian Wilson placed decorations he received for bravery in military service in an envelope along with a note stating that Vietnam "shall not be repeated in Central America," and sent it to Washington. Three other war veterans also engaged in a similar gesture. Oct. 9: The four US war veterans who began a hunger fast Sept. 1 on Capitol Hill to protest American aggression against the Nicaraguan government, accused the Reagan administration of using the "same lies they told during the Vietnam war." The four participated in a telephone interview by the Sandinista daily newspaper, BARRICADA. The strikers told the newspaper that the Oct. 5 downing of the C-123 aircraft piloted by US citizens in southern Nicaragua was "another proof" of direct US interference in the war against the Sandinista government. They also told BARRICADA that 75 war veterans planned to return their military decorations to the Reagan administration on Oct. 9 to join their protest against the "dirty war" in Nicaragua. The veterans reportedly said, "We don't need medals any more. We need to stop the war." Charles Liteky, former army chaplain, was decorated for his participation in the Vietnam war. Two months ago he returned his medal in recognition of bravery in the course of saving the lives of wounded soldiers. He told BARRICADA the US government consistently conceals its actions in Central America from the American people. Liteky said the war in Nicaragua is very similar to the war in Vietnam, both being based on lies. He added he was sad to see his country repeating the same mistakes. Duncan Murphy, a WWII veteran, said that if the Reagan administration continues lying about its activities in Central America, it will "dig its own grave, because the people here are fed up with lies from their president and the congress." Murphy said he and the other hunger strikers were ready to die to "contribute to ending the war on Nicaragua before it reaches larger dimensions." The other two hunger strikers are also Vietnam veterans. In the early days of the hunger strike, the four were largely ignored. Since then, however, they have received growing attention and support. Counterparts in several US cities have reportedly organized hunger strikes every Wednesday in support of the action by Liteky, et al. According to Cuban newspaper PRENSA LATINA, the strikers reported that as many as 18 senators and representatives have spoken to the strikers in the past week, as well as Bishops Thomas Gumbleton and Walter Sullivan, of Detroit and Richmond, Virginia, respectively. Actor Dick Gregory and civil rights movement leaders have also visited them.

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