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COMMON CAUSE
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Disturbing the Peace

"I came down here to raise hell," said Steven Carr, 26, as he lit up a Marlboro in the visitors' area of La Reforma prison outside San José, the capital of Costa Rica.

Carr said he came to Costa Rica "to go to war....My brother was in Vietnam, and I was really pissed that I didn't get to go....I grew up with John Wayne movies. I was in ROTC, the Civil Air Patrol, and I was weaned on that stuff."

Carr got tired of waiting for his chance at combat, so last March he decided to become a real-life Rambo and traveled to Costa Rica to fight "the communists."

He wanted to join the contras—the U.S.-backed rebels trying to overthrow the leftist Sandinista government of Nicaragua, which lies on Costa Rica's northern border.

For six weeks, Carr lived out his dreams. He was armed and transported to the contra camps by anti-communist groups he said were led by Cuban exiles and a farmer from Indiana who Carr and Glibbery said was a CIA liaison in Costa Rica.

The high point of Carr's short-lived career came around mid-April, when he claims to have participated in a raid on a Sandinista camp a day and a half's march inside Nicaragua. He thinks about 30 Sandinista troops may have been killed.

Carr believes bad publicity about that raid may have contributed to the narrow defeat of one of President Reagan's requests for aid to the contras last April.

He added he believes the defeat of the contra aid ultimately may have led the CIA to arrange for his arrest. Carr said that the day after the House vote, he and four other foreign-born adventurers were sent by an alleged CIA liaison to a contra camp in Costa Rica, where they were arrested hours later by Costa Rican public security forces.

Some people dismiss Carr as nothing more than a crazy adventurer, but his story has serious implications. He is a link in a chain of private groups and individuals in the United States who stepped in to help the contras in Costa Rica and Honduras after Congress refused to extend funding for the rebel movement in mid-1984. These private groups have provided the contras with an estimated $25 million in arms, ammunition and supplies since then. Some organizations also are sending men to train and fight with the rebels. Their leaders—who include retired military officers—also pass military intelligence and other information to top administration officials.

Leaders of some groups say they plan to continue their efforts, even though Congress approved $27 million in so-called "humanitarian" or non-military aid to the contras this summer. Critics of aid to the contras contend that no matter what it's called, the aid package is a back-door way of funding the contras' military effort. But the private groups supporting the contras say Congress hasn't gone far enough. They say their help continues to be needed because the CIA and the Pentagon are still prohibited from providing direct military aid to the contras.

For example, retired Army Maj. Gen. John Singlaub—who runs the most effective fundraising operation—says private efforts are still necessary to fill the gap left when the CIA was prohibited by Congress from giving assistance to the rebels.

Singlaub and other private contra supporters say their actions are encouraged and supported by the president. Reagan has spoken openly for months about the need to remove the Sandinista government in "its present structure," and the administration has supported the contras' efforts to overthrow the Nicaraguan government since the early 1980s. The White House defends its actions by saying the Sandinistas are a repressive, anti-democratic regime committed to exporting revolution throughout Central America.

Those who oppose aid to the contras believe it involves the United States in an undeclared war against a sovereign nation, and that it helps fund rebels implicated in numerous atrocities.

Some Members of Congress say the "privatization" of the war, accomplished with the Reagan administration's encouragement, is circumventing the congressional ban on U.S. military assistance to the contras. They say some of these

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