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FILE ONLY

Former CIA agent blasts Reagan's motives in Nicaragua

By Duane Schrag
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NORTH NEWTON — The United States, led by a president with a "fixation on Armageddon," and an intelligence gathering organization responsible for the deaths of millions of people, is carefully laying the groundwork for war in Central America, a former CIA agent said in a speech Thursday night.



John Stockwell, who spoke as a guest in the Bethel College Peace Lecture Series, said President Reagan intends to have the Nicaraguan government overthrown.

"There's not a prayer that he is going to go out of office without ousting the Sandinistas," Stockwell said. "They want to build tensions to the point where they send in the Marines — this is Vietnam in 1964. This is the establishment saying we've got to go in and get it over with. We are in fact poised on the brink of the next war."

Stockwell, who resigned from the CIA in 1977 to write a book highly critical of the agency, has been in Nicaragua recently investigating American involvement in Central America. The information presented Thursday night is fully documented, he told the audience.

At the end of his hour-long speech, he received a standing ovation from the audience of several hundred.

America is involved in "raw terrorism," he said.

"There can be no other word for what the CIA has been doing in Nicaragua," he said. "What they

are trying to do is methodically rip apart the social and economic fabric of the country."

American-backed Contras — Reagan likes to call them freedom fighters, he said — have killed 8,000 people, most of them women and children, he said.

It is not unusual for the Contras to pull a family from its hut and force members to watch the father, mother or child be tortured to death, he said.

"Sometimes for variety they will put (a) grenade in a 7-year-old's mouth and pull the pin," he said. "I suggest to you it is not the Sandinistas that are responsible for the misery (in Nicaragua) — it is the United States."

He talked of American advisers coaching rebels in torture techniques.

"We are taught in our ideology that it is the Gestapo or the KGB that does hideous things to other people," he said.

In reality, all humans — including Americans, are capable of such acts, he said.

Stockwell grew up in the Belgian Congo in a conservative family and then joined the Marines, a young man eager to serve his country, he said. In 1964, he was recruited by the CIA because of his military background and upbringing in Africa.

When he first began to notice the agency's questionable activities he rationalized it by telling himself that he was not responsible for others' actions.

But after serving in Vietnam and witnessing the CIA's bungling there, he became disillusioned. Even so, he was asked to head the CIA's covert activities in Angola, where the CIA was trying to fight the spread of communism.

He decided to play along for a while, to see for himself just how corrupt things were inside the secretive agency.

"I just made a deal with the devil at that point," he said, admitting there was "no honor or nobility" in what he did.

He resigned in 1977 and the following year published "In Search of Enemies," which became a best-seller. Because he wouldn't submit the manuscripts to the CIA for censorship, he was barred by court order from receiving royalties.

At Thursday night's meeting he told the audience the CIA receives 65 cents per copy sold and urged members of the audience not to buy the book. He did suggest, jokingly, that copies might be shoplifted from prosperous bookstores or that people check the book out of local libraries.

Stockwell said the CIA today is trying to "destabilize" the governments of 50 countries.

But the agency has not limited its influence to overseas countries, he said. He reminded the audience of the M.K. Ultra project, the CIA secret experiment in which diseases were spread in American cities and drugs secretly administered.

When the project was exposed, the public outcry forced the CIA to scale back its activities. But the Reagan administration has given the green light to the agency and is proposing laws that would allow for the creation of "death squads," Stockwell said.

Secretary of State George Schultz has for a year been trying to get Congress to approve a "pre-emptive strikes" bill, he said. The bill would allow the government to move against terrorists — in America — before they had a chance to act.