

# Eugenean sees Nicaraguan war Joins 'human shield'

By Guy Maynard  
Of the Emerald

Thinking about the situation in Central America is easy in the abstract, when considering the theoretical and political issues involved, but actually meeting people who have "confronted the horrors of the war" is not so simple.

In early July, Bill Collins of Eugene stood on a lush, green hillside and joined hands with 150 other North Americans and residents of the Nicaraguan city of Jalapa. They lined up along a Nicaraguan defensive trench four miles from the Honduran border, and formed a peaceful, symbolic "human shield" against the U.S.-backed guerrillas who have been attacking Nicaragua from Honduras.

Collins was impressed by the fertile beauty of the country and the warmth of the Nicaraguan people. But he couldn't help thinking about the forces lurking behind the quiet of those hills.

"Within two weeks there will probably be soldiers coming over that hillside and killing these people," Collins says.

During the past year, rebel attacks against Nicaragua's Sandinista government have grown in intensity as U.S. support of the rebels has increased. The Sandinistas came to power after a civil war that overthrew U.S. ally Anastasia Somoza in 1979.

The developing seriousness of U.S. intervention on the border prompted Collins, a 29 year-old carpenter, to go to Nicaragua with his father, Bill Sr. of Detroit, on a tour sponsored by the Carolina Interfaith Task Force.

In Jalapa, they met some of the victims of that intervention.

"One woman described the experience of her son who had died two weeks before — had his face blown off by a rocket made in the United States," Collins says.

Later that same day, Collins, trained as a Licensed Practical Nurse, was serving as medic for the group, administering medication for the many cases of diarrhea and other travel-related problems. He came across a Nicaraguan woman suffering from agonizing stomach pain. He examined her, thinking she might have appendicitis.

"Then I discovered she was the woman who had given this report of her son dying. It was real clear what was happening was that she was so tense, she was developing physical problems as a result of her emotional trauma," Collins says.

"We forget about the extent to which living under these conditions affects people on so many different levels," he says.

Political and economic development is difficult for Nicaragua because the people are living in a constant state of war and fear, Collins says.

Collins and his father spent five days with the organized tour, attending church services and grassroots political meetings and talking to government officials. Then, after other members of the tour left Nicaragua, they spent two weeks in a \$2-a-night hotel in a poor barrio



Photo by Mark Pynes

Eugenean Bill Collins ponders his recent trip to war-torn Nicaragua, where he was met with open arms, despite their perception of the U.S. as "enemy."

in Managua, Nicaragua's capital, roaming the country and talking to people.

Nicaraguans are angry about U.S. involvement in the border war, and they disbelieve the Reagan administration's position that the conflict in Central America boils down to a Soviet/U.S. confrontation, Collins says.

"The feeling of the vast majority of people I met is the U.S. government says that, but the U.S. people can't possibly believe it. Why would we want to be dominated by the Soviet Union after losing 60,000 people in the war to throw out Somoza who was maintained in power by the United States," Collins says.

Collins never saw any foreign military advisers in Nicaragua, but it wouldn't surprise him if they are there. The Nicaraguans believe they have a right to defend themselves and the United States has refused to help them, Collins says.

Instead of evidence of Soviet domination, Collins found evidence of national pride and determination. Pictures of Augusto Sandino, leader of a successful rebellion against U.S. marines in the 1930s and namesake of the Sandinistas, are seen throughout Nicaragua.

"To most of the people I met, the heart of the issue (in the border war) is the right for national sovereignty and the right for a country to internally work out its problems without pressure from the outside," Collins says.

## Nicaraguan war opponents plan vigil

People opposing the U.S. covert war against the Nicaraguan government will gather in a vigil in front of the Federal Building at the corner of Seventh Avenue and Pearl Street in Eugene Thursday, Aug. 11, from noon until 6 p.m.

The vigil is co-sponsored by Clergy and Laity Concerned, the Committee in Solidarity

with the Central American People, the Eugene Council for Human Rights in Latin America and the Latin America Support Committee.

Among those expected to speak from noon until 1 p.m. is Bill Collins, a Eugenean carpenter who recently returned from a five day tour of Nicaragua with the Carolina

Interfaith Task Force.

While in Nicaragua, Collins talked with various organizations and officials of the Sandinista government. He also spent one day in the border town of Jalapa, where he witnessed the effects of Honduran military raids on Nicaragua, according to vigil co-organizer Charlie Aker.

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