

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 3EBOSTON GLOBE
17 December 1986

Combatant had tales to tell, lawyer says

By Thomas Palmer
Globe Staff

VAN NUYS, Calif. - Late in October, as Steven Paul Carr, an aspiring soldier of fortune, sat out a six-month jail term in Naples, Fla., for a parole violation, he was visited by a man who identified himself as a representative of the CIA. The man asked Carr to return to Central America and resume the battle against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

Carr told his attorney of the offer shortly before being released from jail and leaving for California to live with friends - and escape the pressure of being a man who may have known too much.

The 27-year-old sometime carpenter died here early last Saturday of an apparently self-administered cocaine overdose. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," he reportedly told a woman friend with whom he was staying. "I panicked out - I ate it all."

The offer to return to Central America - the last thing Carr sought, having spent months in a Costa Rican jail for allegedly involving himself in combat operations against Sandinista troops across the border - was one of several reasons he may have had to be fearful, attorney Gerry Berry said.

The attorney said he warned Carr that he should be careful because of his knowledge of secret military actions involving Americans in Central America.

"He was one of the only people who could testify that money coming from government, or private sources, was used to buy guns in violation of arms treaties," Berry said in a telephone interview.

The office of Sen. John F. Kerry had sought Carr as a congressional witness to suspected illegal activities in Central America, but Kerry's requests for an investigation had been ignored by the Reagan administration. No forum existed for Carr to tell his story - until late November, when news of the sale of US arms to Iran became public, and subsequently the announcement of the potentially illegal diversion of profits to the contra rebel effort in Nicaragua.

Not only had Carr told what he knew to the Globe, from his San Jose jail cell last spring. He had also been interviewed by federal investigators from Miami. And, more recently, he appeared on the CBS news magazine "West 57th Street."

"With the contra deal and Reagan, he'd become an overnight sensation," said Los Angeles Po-

lice Detective Mel Arnold, chief of homicide for the Van Nuys division, who is investigating Carr's death.

Carr was a potential witness in a federal grand jury investigation in Miami into a March 1985 shipment of arms from Florida to Costa Rica. He was also expected to be called to testify in a \$23 million civil suit against 29 persons alleged to be organizers of a private network of aid to the contras.

Carr had expressed concern about his safety, making sure doors were locked at a stucco-and-redwood apartment complex that is standard along the palm-fringed streets of the San Fernando Valley.

"Everybody knew that he did some coke," said Arnold, but friends were not particularly concerned about him. Police do not know where Carr spent Friday evening, but Arnold was told by Jacqueline Perry, the woman with whom Carr was staying, that Carr had come home at about 10 p.m. that night and gone to his room. Hours later, Arnold said, Perry heard noises from the room. Carr told her, "Watch me, I've been drinking too much."

At about 3 a.m., the bearded, long-haired Carr, dressed in underwear and a robe, went outside and fell into convulsions. He was dead when paramedics arrived.

Believing it was a routine death, police conducted only a cursory examination of the premises. While there is no evidence that it was other than an accidental overdose, Berry said yesterday, he remains troubled by the fact that Carr had told him of receiving threats for having been so public about his and others' roles as soldiers of fortune in Central America.

There was no doubt that the 27-year-old Carr, who envied his brother for being old enough to have served in Vietnam, loved combat. As Carr recalled telling one person who advised him to show more caution in the field, "I kept telling him I was bullet-proof."

The only battlefields that Carr could find were in Central America. He made a brief visit to Costa Rica in mid-1984, but was told by one American supporter there that he needed to learn Spanish before he could join the contras. "I took my course in the bars," Carr

later said, and left soon after to return to Florida.

Less than a year later, Carr returned to Costa Rica, this time, he said, aboard a private plane laden with ammunition and weapons for the contras. The military supplies, barred by several US laws from being secretly shipped, had been gathered by Carr and others from persons in the Miami area sympathetic to the contras. Carr joined a group of about 20 contras, Cuban-Americans and Western soldiers of fortune who were camped out in northern Costa Rica, close to the Nicaraguan border.

In late April, less than two months in the field, Carr and five others were arrested for taking part in a contra raid on a Sandinista military encampment inside Nicaragua.

Describing the raid in a letter to his brother Edward in Brandon, Vt., Carr wrote: "We hit them pretty good. A couple of times by radio accounts one raid on La Esparanza got us 70 killed in action for them with only one wounded for us. . . . Anyway, it wasn't exactly what I expected it to be. We got busted and still aren't sure the CIA didn't want it so. They may have set us up, more later when I get back out."

Carr spent nearly a year in La Reforma prison on the outskirts of San Jose, Costa Rica.

In an interview with the Globe last spring, Carr said he had been recruited to travel to Costa Rica by Civilian Military Assistance, an Alabama-based group that ostensibly provides nonmilitary aid to the rebels.

The leader of the group, Thomas Posey, yesterday repeated his denials of that allegation and said Carr was not a member, though others arrested with him were. "He met them out in the field," Posey said, adding, "Nobody's ever heard of any of the combat he was talking about."

Carr never formally faced the charges he was jailed for in Costa Rica. After being bailed for \$1,000 last spring, he made his way to its southern border and crossed over to Panama.

Continued

The person who caused Carr the most distress was the man who visited him in his Naples jail cell in October a month before his release and said that he worked for the CIA. Although Carr refused the offer to return to Central America, Berry said, he had been talking about becoming a mercenary on behalf of white segregationist forces in South Africa.

When the person offered to make Carr an "operative" in South Africa, Carr was ready to accept despite Berry's warnings. "I said, 'Steven, the CIA are people who don't want you around. You'll wind up with a bullet in your back.'"

A CIA spokesman characterized Carr's contention of being visited by a CIA agent as "totally false." A second spokesman said "That sounds too stupid for words."

Arnold concurred with the preliminary coroner's conclusion that it was drugs, not political intrigue, that caused Carr's death.

Asked about reports that Carr had exhibited signs of fear recently, Arnold pointed to his nose, making an inhaling gesture, and held his fingers in front of his lips, as if to draw in on a cigarette.

"Toot will cause that," Arnold said, referring to cocaine. "Of course, so will gunrunning for the contras."

(Yvonne Daley, Globe correspondent, contributed to this report.)