

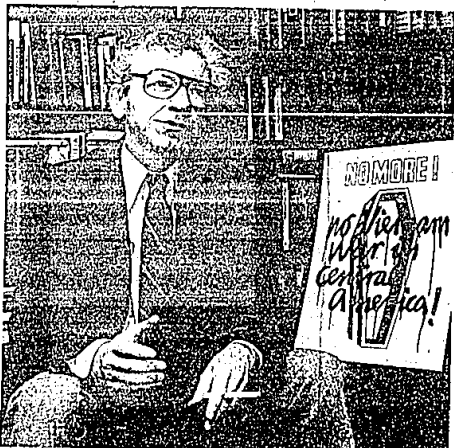
He stands for peace along Nicaraguan border

By Alice Collins
staff writer

The way Rudy Simons of Bloomfield Township spent his winter vacation

would probably be considered unusual by most.

But those who know Rudy Simons wouldn't think it unusual for him at all. Simons — businessman, music writ-



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Peace activist Rudy Simons is home safe from a mission to Nicaragua where he and other Americans attempted to stop the fighting along the Nicaragua-Honduras border.

er and publisher, world traveler, former broadcast journalist and formerly in advertising — spent his two-week winter vacation in Nicaragua.

In January, he and 27 other Americans went to the volatile, war-torn Central American country to "witness for peace."

"The idea," said Simons, "was to stop the fighting by putting ourselves between the Nicaraguan citizens and the counter-revolutionary forces attacking from over the Honduran border."

Simons and the others went to a place along the Honduran border at the points of attack.

"We went into the fields on the border with Nicaraguan coffee pickers," said Simons. "All the time we heard rifle, machine gun and mortar fire in the border area. We saw the flaming trails of mortar going through the night skies."

But the weapons fire was not aimed at them or in the area where they had placed themselves.

"AFTER PICKING the beans," he continued, "we held a silent vigil facing Honduras. Then we joined the Nicaraguans with a song fest."

The contra-revolutionists up on a hillside in Honduras "looked down on us all the time." But there was no fighting.

"It seems to work," said Simons. "When the Americans are there the attacks stop."

"Witness for Peace" is an international organization put together by the National Organization of Clergy and Laity Concerned. Every two weeks a new group of Witness for Peace delegates goes to the border area to try and stop the fighting.

"No one's been hurt yet to my knowledge," said Simons. "And it's been working."

The American peace activists, in addition to trying to stop the fighting, are also opposed to the U.S. policy toward Nicaragua. The United States is sending military aid to the forces opposing the Sandinista revolutionary regime that ousted the Somoza dictatorship in 1979.

"WE WANT the Nicaraguans to know a considerable segment of the American people is opposed to present American policy of training the (contra-revolutionary) army and encouraging attacks in Nicaragua," said Simons. There's also another reason for the mission — to let the American government know of their objections.

At the end of the stay in Nicaragua, the group staged a peaceful protest on the grounds inside the U.S. Embassy compound in Managua, Nicaragua.

First the group met with U.S. Ambassador Anthony Quainton and presented him with a letter addressed to "Citizen Ronald Reagan, president of the United States."

"Then," said Simons, "we put on black arm bands, read the letter, then stood in a circle and prayed with those who prayed, some meditated, some expressed thoughts."

"They (embassy officials) were very unhappy with us and at first ordered us to leave the grounds and continue outside. But we insisted that as Americans we had the right to stand on American ground to deliver our message. So they allowed us to continue."

AFTER THE protest, many in the group, including Simons, went to a Ni-

caraguan hospital to donate blood.

During the mission, the witness delegates talked with Nicaraguan citizens, representatives of major political parties and unions, newspaper editors, American nuns working there, those in a Salvadoran refugee camp and others.

"While there we were free to talk with anyone," said Simons. They visited with the opposition newspaper and representatives of opposition political parties.

In their letter to Reagan, they wrote: "Not once did we hear statements supporting national territory expansion or military build-up, nor did we hear the inflammatory bombast of the traditional military dictator. We did hear repeated regrets that Nicaragua must concentrate its energy and its resources on its

own defense rather than on sorely needed special programs."

SIMONS IS now back home contemplating his trip and the results. At 7:30 p.m. Thursday, he'll make a report at a meeting at Christ Church Cranbrook in Bloomfield Hills. The meeting is sponsored by the Episcopal Peace Fellowship, Center for Peace and Conflict Studies at Wayne State University and the Detroit Council for World Affairs of Wayne State.

Asked why he would put his life in danger in the middle of a battlefield, Simons said: "Individual action can be important. And if there are enough individuals, they can work together for what they perceive to be justice and peace."

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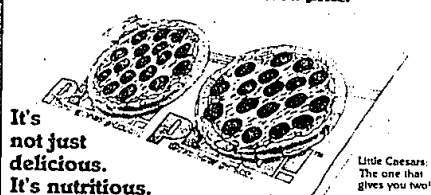
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