

the huge crowd quieted down, the familiar voice of John Kennedy, recorded during a 1961 special message to Congress, echoed across the vast, suddenly silent plaza. "I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth . . ." The hush acknowledged the setting of an awesome task only eight years ago, a time that seemed to be both very recent and oddly remote. The cheering that ensued was for the men who reached that ineffable goal—and for the nation that persevered to make it possible.

THE WAR

End of the Lull

While the nation rejoiced with the astronauts, the war in Viet Nam took a grim turn. For two months, a lull had hung over South Viet Nam's battlefields and U.S. diplomats and military men debated its meaning. Many of the diplomats argued that the decline in combat signaled a favorable response from Hanoi to U.S. troop withdrawals and meant that there would soon be progress in the deadlocked Paris peace talks. But the combat commanders contended that the enemy was using the pause only to prepare for a new offensive. Last week the Communists apparently settled the argument.

In one 24-hour period, the enemy launched coordinated attacks against 137 towns and U.S. installations across much of the country. In the sharpest fighting since last February's post-Tet offensive, Communist rockets and mortar shells rained down on Saigon, Hué and Danang. Rested and re-equipped North Vietnamese divisions assaulted American fortifications and important towns in South Viet Nam's central provinces. The most intense attacks were aimed at three vulnerable provinces some 75 miles above Saigon—Tay Ninh, Binh Long and Phuoc Long.

The new attacks caused a sharp rise in U.S. casualties. In the first day of fighting, 94 Americans were killed; by week's end, the toll rose to about 200. But the Communists paid dearly; left behind on the battlefields were some 3,000 enemy bodies. U.S. military experts reckoned that the attacks represented the start of the Communists' "autumn campaign" and a new strategy of relative military inaction interspersed with "high points." The aim: to erode American will and to prevent Saigon from consolidating political power.

Though last week's high point will not interfere with the already scheduled withdrawal of 25,000 troops this month, it may upset President Nixon's plans to pull out a total of perhaps 100,000 by year's end. The Administration has said that further withdrawals will depend partly on a decrease in the level of fighting. Thus, Hanoi's decision to intensify the fighting may well prompt a slowdown in the U.S. reduction of forces.

TIME, AUGUST 22, 1969

GREEN BERETS ON TRIAL

IN the shadowy world of the intelligence agent, the phrase "to terminate with prejudice" means to blackball an agent administratively so that he cannot work again as an informer. When the phrase "to terminate with extreme prejudice" is used, it often becomes the cloak-and-dagger code for extermination. In June, just such an execution order reached a U.S. Special Forces outfit in a port city of South Viet Nam. Seven Green Beret officers and one enlisted man helped to carry it out. The upshot was their arrest and detention pending investigation. Last week, as the Army maintained total silence and a host of rumors swirled through offices and bars in Saigon, Washington and Green Beret headquarters at Fort Bragg, N.C., a

tral Office for Research and Studies). Chuyen was picked up in Tay Ninh near the Cambodian border and brought to Nha Trang for "hard" interrogation. Later he was taken to Saigon, shot full of sodium pentothal and given a lie-detector test. The interrogations convinced the Green Berets that Chuyen was a double agent serving Hanoi as well as the U.S. Because the CIA has overall responsibility for secret agents in Viet Nam, it was notified at once. The CIA sent the fatal reply: "Terminate with extreme prejudice." A few days later, the CIA countermanded its "extreme" order—but by then it was too late.

Chuyen had already been given a massive dose of morphine, bundled into a boat and shot to death with a .22-cal. pis-



COLONEL ROBERT B. RHEAULT

At least someone was speaking loud and clear.



GEORGE GREGORY

bizarre tale of counterespionage began to unfold.

The alleged crime centers around Special Forces Unit B-57 (code name: "Black Beard") located on Nha Trang airbase 190 miles northeast of Saigon. Like two other outfits (B-52 and B-55) operating in Viet Nam, B-57 is a Special Forces intelligence unit, commanded by Major David Crew of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, one of the eight under arrest. It was engaged in counterespionage along the borders of Laos and Cambodia, employing a network of 300 secret agents to spot enemy infiltrators, supply dumps and rest camps. One of its top agents was a Vietnamese national with the cover name of Thai Khac Chuyen.

Too Late. Early in June, B-57 received intelligence photos snapped in Cambodia by another of its spies showing Agent Chuyen in conversation with a man known to be a high official in the North Vietnamese intelligence system, the CNC (Cuc Nghien Cuu—Cen-

tol. His body, weighted with chains, was dumped into either the deep, mud-bottomed Giang River or the South China Sea. Despite weeks of full-time dredging by three ships, Chuyen's body has not been recovered.

South Viet Nam literally swarms with spies and agents of all sorts. On the allied side alone, there are said to be at least 15 separate intelligence organizations, often antagonistic to one another. A roundup of suspected enemy spies and agents last month netted 69 prisoners, including Huynh Van Trong, a longtime friend of President Thieu's and his Special Assistant for Political Affairs. Rumors in Saigon at once linked the Green Beret case to the recent roundup.

Double Deaths. After arresting the Green Berets, the Army, both in Washington and Viet Nam, was being close-mouthed. Attorneys for the defense, most notably George Winfred Gregory, 31, from Cheraw, S.C., were speaking loud and clear. Gregory, a boyhood

friend of Major Thomas Middleton, one of the accused, flew to Saigon last week to handle the case. Authorities in Washington had not been helpful, groused Gregory. "All they were giving me," he said, "was passport instructions." Gregory claims to have it on good authority that last year some 160 double agents were executed, or ordered executed, by Americans. Because of this, the harsh treatment meted out to the eight baffles observers in Saigon and Congressmen in Washington. Gregory wonders aloud how any of the men can be charged with murder when "any killing that might have been done was in the carrying out of a lawful order."

Intensive Heat. At week's end the Army was still keeping silent and acting tough. Colonel Robert Rheault, a much-decorated West Pointer who commanded all Special Forces in Viet Nam, was being held in a house trailer. The seven other accused Green Berets were confined in small, metal-roofed rooms at the infamous Long Binh jail, noted for riots and p.o.w.-like conditions. There they were allowed only one exercise period a day and subjected to repeated interrogation. At least one officer has gone through several "strip searches," in which the prisoner is required to take off all his clothes for minute examination.

Heat of such intensity can come from only one source in Viet Nam—General Creighton Abrams, the U.S. commander. Why was Abrams reacting so strongly? Saigon's rumor mills have ground out at least three plausible theories: 1) The killing inflamed long-smoldering resentment between the military and the Central Intelligence Agency, with the Green Berets caught in the middle. It is said that Abrams made an issue of the case as a warning to the CIA to stop using the Special Forces to do its dirty work. 2) The victim was an extremely important agent, possibly a special emissary from President Thieu to Hanoi or a North Vietnamese courier who had already been granted immunity. This would explain the CIA's belated effort to rescind its execution order. It would also explain the trial of the Green Berets as a way for the U.S. to say, in effect: "We are sorry your man got rubbed out." 3) Perhaps most likely, the whole affair is a colossal military snafu. According to this theory, Abrams might have been annoyed at news of the killing, and told aides in an offhand manner, "We've got to clean those guys up." Overzealous subordinates, misinterpreting his remark, then might have ordered the arrests. Before the imprisoned men could be sprung and the affair hushed up, Lawyer Gregory had heard from Middleton and brought the case into the open.

Whatever the truth, it is now impossible for the Army to drop the affair quietly. There are doubts, however, that a court-martial would unearth the real story—or that a court-martial will in fact be held.

An Embattled Badge of Courage

FOR nearly a decade after a new Special Forces group was set up at Fort Bragg, N.C., in 1952 to cope with guerrilla forces, the organization languished. At first, the group's members were permitted to wear the Special Forces' distinctive green berets, borrowed from Britain's World War II commandos, within the confines of Fort Bragg. In 1956, the headgear was banned altogether because it looked "too foreign."

President John F. Kennedy, who

FRED FARRISH



BERETS TRAINING IN FLORIDA

read James Bond novels and foresaw the need for countering insurgency warfare, particularly in beleaguered Southeast Asia, gave a new lease of life to the Special Forces when he took office. The green beret was reinstated—almost enshrined. Said J.F.K. in 1962: "The green beret is again becoming a symbol of excellence, a badge of courage, a mark of distinction in the fight for freedom." Around that time, 600 members of the Special Forces were serving as advisers in South Viet Nam. In those palmy days, the Green Berets were the darlings of the New Frontier. At Fort Bragg, they often entertained White House aides and members of Congress with what they called "Disneyland." It is a stirring demonstration ranging from scuba diving and hand-to-hand combat to archery and rappelling (descending a cliff on a double rope).

The Special Forces now number between 9,000 and 10,000 men. The officers come from other branches

of the Army, to which they normally return; the enlisted men, all volunteers, tend to spend their entire military careers in the Special Forces. The operating units are scattered around the continents: 3,000 in South Viet Nam, 400 in northeastern Thailand, 800 in Okinawa, 250 in Bad Toelz just south of Munich in West Germany, 800 in the Panama Canal Zone, and 3,000 in training at Fort Bragg.

Generally, the Green Berets work at a higher Intelligence level than the G-2s (Intelligence chiefs) of the Army and Marines, who are more or less limited to information-gathering. The Green Beret networks have a much wider range and tend, for example, to have closer contacts with the CIA, as was the case at Nha Trang. As the elite of the Army, the Green Berets are highly skilled: the communications men can repair their own radios; the medics are surgeons without diplomas; the demolition men can destroy almost anything. Most are multilingual, and all have had extensive paratroop training.

In Viet Nam, the Green Berets were assigned the task of border surveillance, interdiction of enemy supply routes, attacks and ambushes. In addition, they work with the border natives, mostly Nungs and Montagnards, operating nearly 70 border and highlands camps where a dozen Green Berets will spearhead a force of several hundred irregulars.

There have long been reports that the Green Berets also employ some dirty ways—if occasionally necessary ones. It is as easy to confirm such reports as it is to get the CIA to admit that it engages in spying on other countries. Nonetheless, the Special Forces have been accused of torturing and killing prisoners, parachuting poisoned foodstuffs into enemy camps, and slipping doctored ammunition, designed to explode on use, into enemy arms caches.

Some Army officers feel that the Green Berets may be a little too special. When retired General Harold K. Johnson, former Army Chief of Staff, visited the Green Berets in Viet Nam, he told them: "You are doing a fine job, but there is just too much talent for one thin unit." His feeling is that the Green Berets skim off the cream of the enlisted men and thus become a talent drain on the rest of the Army. Enough Army officers agree with him to raise the very real possibility that in the wake of the current murder case, the proud green beret may once again fade from prominence.