

New Beret Chief Named in Vietnam

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A new commander for the Green Berets in Vietnam was announced in Saigon yesterday as a fresh account turned up in Washington to explain why former commander Robert R. Rheault and seven fellow Berets landed in an Army stockade.

The U.S. military command in Vietnam announced that

Col. Michael D. Healy will be the new commander of the 5th Special Forces Group, replacing Col. Alexander Lemberes. Lemberes succeeded Col. Rheault last July 21 when Rheault was relieved of his command and imprisoned with the other Berets following the reported murder of a Vietnamese agent or double agent.

The major unanswered question, but not the only one, has been why the Army suddenly relieved the colonel, a West Pointer, of his command, jailed him and the seven others even before an investigation was completed and then announced the arrests.

Attorneys for the jailed men have put the finger on the Central Intelligence Agency, contending that the murder was the result of a CIA order, couched in the melodramatic phrase "terminate with extreme prejudice."

To charges of involvement the CIA, has had only a public "no comment." But it has been evident for some time that the agency feels it is the victim of a bum rap.

Now comes this account:

After the agent was picked up, and suspected of being a double agent for the Communists, the Berets asked the CIA in South Vietnam what they should do. They were advised to turn the man over to South Vietnamese intelligence agents.

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Then the agent was indeed killed and his body dumped into the South China Sea. The man is said to have been a minor figure in intelligence work.

But one of the eight accused, either out of regret or remorse, went to the CIA and told what had been done. The CIA, saying it was not the agency's business told him to tell his story to the army.

The man did so, and Gen. Creighton Abrams, U.S. commander in Vietnam, ordered an investigation. But when Abrams' investigator questioned the Green Berets one of them told a different tale. He said that the agent had been sent on a mission and simply had not returned. Abrams reportedly blew up at what he by then thought was a lie and ordered the eight imprisoned. Subsequently there were several substantiating ac-

counts—three by one Saigon version—of the murder.

This version like most of the others so far about aspects of the bizarre case, has a self-serving element. The total truth remains to be disclosed.

Yesterday in Saigon, Army Secretary Stanley R. Resor, prior to leaving on another leg of his Asian tour, told newsmen that the Army would like to tell its side of the story but feels it must remain silent to protect the rights of the accused men.

Resor said he appreciated the "great public interest" but added that after examining the facts "I don't think it would be appropriate for me to release any further substantive information at this time." He spoke of the Army's "obligation to insure that the rights of the eight individuals to a fair trial are fully protected."

Resor said it may be at least another two weeks before

there is a decision on whether to try Rheault and the seven other men. The Army's pretrial investigation was completed Aug. 21 and the findings are now under review before they go to Gen. George L. Mabry, commander of support forces in Vietnam.

Resor said he was "satisfied that the case is being properly handled by all concerned" and that he had discussed it with Abrams.

Lemberes, of Reno, Nev., will leave for the United States "where he can receive special treatment" for an ankle broken July 26 in a parachute jump, an Army spokesman in Saigon said.

The new commander, Col. Healy, is a 12-year veteran of the Berets and his appointment was seen in Washington as a signal from the Army to the Berets, an Army component, that they will have one of their own as boss in Vietnam. Some reports have said that the Army was using the

murder case to downgrade the Berets, but other sources deny this.

Healy served in Vietnam with the 5th Special Forces Group and also in West Germany with the 10th Special forces. His last post was in the Mekong delta where he commanded the 1st Brigade of the 9th Division. He recently accompanied the Brigade back to Hawaii where it is being deactivated as part of President Nixon's just-completed 25,000-man troop withdrawal.