

Ex-Beret Rheault, Leader In 'Slaying' Case, Retires

By Richard Homan
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Col. Robert B. Rheault, former commander of U.S. Special Forces in Vietnam and one of the eight Green Berets once accused of murdering a suspected double agent, retired from the Army yesterday with little advance notice.

The Pentagon said Rheault, who will receive a partial pension based on 23 years in the Army, applied for retirement on Tuesday and received approval Thursday.

Retirement approval and processing normally requires several weeks, but the Pentagon said military officials—at Army Secretary Hanley R. Resor's direction—"moved as expeditiously as they could to respond to Rheault's request."

Rheault's retirement was "a personal decision on his part," Pentagon spokesman Jerry W. Friedheim said. The Pentagon gave no further reason for the unexpected move and Rheault, whose 44th birthday was yesterday, could not be reached at either his Brookline or Martha's Vineyard, Mass., homes.

Offered New Posts

Since returning to the United States on Oct. 1, Rheault has been on leave. During that time, according to Friedheim, he was "given a choice of new assignments and decided to retire."

The three assignments that Rheault was offered and turned down were characterized by military sources as ex-

cellent for a career officer at Rheault's age and rank.

They were chief of plans division for U.S. Army, Europe; member of the division for strategic studies at the Institute for Advanced Studies, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.; and the Combined Development Command at Ft. Leavenworth, Kan.

Rheault, a 1946 West Point graduate, appeared to have an excellent future in the Army before being jailed with fellow Green Berets during the investigation of the alleged slaying of a South Vietnamese man. He said earlier this month that he intended to stay in the Army if he could do so "as a first-class citizen."

Six of the other Green Berets involved in the incident have accepted new military assignments. The seventh, Capt. Robert F. Marasco, resigned. Marasco is now hospitalized as a result of an auto accident.

Rheault will receive a pension of \$9,747 a year for the rest of his life, the Pentagon said. The amount is 57 per cent of his base pay of \$17,100.

Sources close to the Green Berets said Rheault has been offered sizable sums from publishers for his account of the alleged murder.

A spokesman for Life magazine, however, said last night that, "We have his story but we didn't buy it—it didn't cost us anything."

Publication of detailed accounts of his military activi-

ties would have been difficult for Rheault, if not impossible, while he remained in the Army.

Jailed In August

Rheault and the seven other Green Berets were jailed in August, shortly after Rheault was transferred from command of all Special Forces in Vietnam. He and five other officers were ordered court-martialed on charges of murder and conspiracy to murder Thai Khac Chuyen, a suspected double agent.

When Central Intelligence Agency officials refused to testify in the court-martial, the Army dropped all charges, saying that without CIA testimony the men could not get a fair trial.

Rheault was given a physical examination and completed paperwork in Washington this week, the Pentagon said, and his retirement became effective yesterday.

Friedheim made it clear that Rheault was given priority treatment with the approval of the highest Defense Department officials.

Besides the specific approval by Resor, Friedheim said, "the Secretary of Defense was aware of the situation."

"I think it's been obvious that special attention has been given to the careers of these individuals," Friedheim said. "I think everyone was aware of the Secretary's desire that these men receive expeditious attention."