

# 'Berets' Case Victim Seen Minor Figure

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SAIGON, Aug. 19—The apparent victim in the Green Beret murder case was a 31-year-old native of North Vietnam known to his family as an interpreter for U.S. Special Forces troops.

Unless descriptions offered by the victim's wife and brother today are wildly misleading, the dead man was almost certainly not a major U.S. intelligence agent or an important Vietnamese official. Instead, the picture that emerges is of a relatively low-level operator.

The victim, apparently, was

Thai Khac Chuyen. A garbled version of this name was released Friday by George Gregory, an attorney for one of the eight Green Berets accused in the case. Gregory said he thought the name was "a cover."

Chuyen's brother read of Gregory's press conference in a Vietnamese newspaper and volunteered his story to a local journalist today. It fits almost perfectly with facts of the case that have already been confirmed.

See BERETS, A9, Col. 1

## BERETS, From A1

Meanwhile, the U.S. Army announced today that the eight suspects in the case had been moved from maximum security solitary confinement into air-conditioned quarters loosely guarded by military police. The move followed protests from at least three congressmen over the Army's treatment of the suspects, who have not yet been formally charged.

### Relatives' Story

This is the story told by Thai Khac Chuong, brother of the apparent victim, and the victim's wife, Phan Kim Lien:

On the afternoon of last June 11, Chuyen arrived unexpectedly in Saigon from Mochoa in Kientuong Province, just a few miles below the Cambodian border, where he was stationed with U.S. Special Forces troops. Chuyen told his wife that he had been ordered to report to Camp Goodman, a Special Forces camp in downtown Saigon, for questioning about his refusal to perform an unspecified secret mission for the Green Berets.

On the morning of June 12, Chuyen left his home on the

outskirts of Saigon and went to Camp Goodman. That afternoon he was brought back to the house by an American Special Forces officer and a South Vietnamese officer who searched his house.

That night Chuyen was allowed to go home alone, his wife reported. He appeared to be in an agitated state, she said. He told her he had been questioned while sitting in what she called an "electric chair," probably a polygraph. Sources close to the accused Berets have said the victim was questioned with a polygraph and with sodium pentathol, often called the "truth serum."

On the morning of June 13, Chuyen went off again to Camp Goodman. He told his wife, she said today, that if he did not return, she should go to the camp and ask for information about his whereabouts.

Chuyen has not been seen or heard from since. His wife said she went to Camp Goodman to ask about him, but was told by Americans there that they knew nothing about her husband.

### Killed June 20

The army has announced that the victim in the Green Beret case was murdered on June 20, one week after Chuyen disappeared. Other reliable sources have said that the victim was an intelligence operative who went into Cambodia for the Green Berets. This conforms with Chuyen's brother's report that he was based in Mochoa, just outside a section of Cambodia that is heavily used by Vietcong troops.

Chuyen went to work for the Green Berets in December, 1965, his family said. He served first in the Ashau Valley area near the Laotian border in northern South Vietnam. Later he worked in Tayninh Province, which adjoins Cambodia, then in Cantho in the Mekong Delta, and finally in Mochoa.

In his last assignment, Chuyen had told his family, he translated secret documents captured from the Communists. His wife said today that Chuyen had no interest in politics, and that he always dreamed of living a peaceful life with his family. He was born in Thanhhoa Province in what is now North Vietnam.

Chuyen's wife said that if

her husband were dead, she was entitled to at least three months of his salary. He made 15,000 piasters a month, she said—about \$125.

Information gathered in small pieces from American sources here in recent days also suggests that the Green Beret case involves misjudgment and confusion rather than any startling intrigue. Some of these sources have an interest in conveying such an impression, but their story seems to merit serious consideration nevertheless.

The story goes something like this: the Green Berets decided that a man in their employ — presumably Chuyen — was working for the other side. As reported earlier, this decision was based on photographs of enemy operatives taken in Cambodia. The Berets thought they recognized their employee in these photos.

#### Lie Detector Test

The Berets then began to question the man, using a Polygraph, sodium pentathol and perhaps other techniques. According to a source close to the accused men, the polygraph test indicated that the suspect was working for the Communists.

With this information, the Berets apparently approached the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, which reportedly directs some Green Beret operations and plays a role in others. The soldiers asked the CIA what to do with the man.

The agency's reply is a matter of sharp debate, and is likely to be a crucial issue in the pre-trial investigation of the eight men and any subsequent court martial, if charges are pressed. The Green Berets, or at least some of them, contend that the CIA said they should "terminate with extreme prejudice" their relations with the agent, a phrase they interpreted as meaning they should kill him.

According to a source close to the defense, the Green Berets asked the CIA to do its own dirty work, but this request was refused — or perhaps the agency denied wanting to do away with the man. However, this source said, the soldiers decided the man had to be killed because the information he possessed endangered the lives of too many men.

Lawyers representing the

Green Berets contend there is no case against their clients. A second civilian attorney, Henry B. Rothblatt of New York, entered the case today. Rothblatt, who has written two books on criminal law with F. Lee Bailey, said the Army's case was based on "the flimsiest evidence" and "appears to be a situation where somebody goofed." He is representing three of the defendants.

However, a source who should know the facts has revealed that several of the accused Green Berets have made incriminating statements which are a significant part of the prosecution's case.

#### Question Remains

This version of events leaves unanswered one key question: Why did the Army suddenly relieve Col. Robert Rheault of his command of the Green Berets in Vietnam and throw him and seven others into prison even before an investigation into the incident was completed, and then issue a press release announcing the arrests?

Some sources say this apparently odd behavior can be explained by the top command's loss of patience with the methods and attitudes of the Special Forces. It is said that regular Army commanders have

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long harbored distaste for the Green Berets and their tactics, and that this episode was the proverbial last straw.

Another version is that the CIA was fed up with the Green Berets taking matters into their own hands, and pressed the Pentagon to make an example of this case. The Pentagon agreed, according to this version, in part because of its distaste for the Green Berets.

There is still no good explanation for the Army's arbitrary treatment of the suspects, or for the decision to announce they were suspected

of murder before formal charges were brought.

Today's announcement that the men have been removed from solitary confinement suggests that the earlier arbitrary treatment may have been a mistake—a mistake the Army has acknowledged by transferring the prisoners to comfortable surroundings.

As for when the case may come to a head, the Army is not saying. Today's official statement released on the transfer of the prisoners said the "duration of the preliminary investigation . . . cannot be predicted."