

Freed Green Berets Have Predawn Barracks Party

Six Prepare to Head for Home Today

By RICHARD PYLE

LONG BINH (AP) — Six Green Beret officers freed of murder charges in the death of an alleged Vietnamese double agent jubilantly staged a predawn barracks beer party and prepared to go home Tuesday, declaring they never doubted the outcome of the sensational case.

They gathered outside the sprawling Long Binh post on Saigon's suburbs and happily skylarked for newsmen, giving the thumbs up sign and loudly playing "The Ballad of the Green Berets" on a small tape recorder.

"The outcome we never doubted at any time. The only question was how long and how difficult it would be to prove the

point," said Col. Robert Rheault, the trim, 43-year-old West Pointer who was commander of the Special Forces troops in Vietnam until he was placed under arrest two months ago.

When the news came unofficially from Washington early Tuesday, Rheault woke up his comrades and they had the beer party in celebration. A Military Police officer showed up 2½ hours later with the official confirmation.

MANY QUESTIONS

Amidst the celebration by the Green Beret officers, however, a cloud still hung over the case with many questions left unanswered.

Rheault said he would withhold judgment on whether to stay in the Army. Some of the other officers were planning to get out.

The widow of the alleged double agent, Thai Khac Chuyen, became almost hysterical when she was told by newsmen that the accused murderers of her husband had been freed. In her tiny home in Saigon, the widow wept and said the Americans were cruel and worse than the Viet Cong.

Neither the U.S. Embassy nor military headquarters has officially admitted to her that her husband is dead.

Speaking to newsmen, however, Rheault publicly stated for the first time that he did believe her husband was an agent.

BELIEVED AGENT

Asked if there actually had been a double agent in the Special Forces, Rheault replied: "There was a penetration agent, yes."

What was a penetration agent, Rheault was asked. An enemy who came in under the guise of a friend, the colonel replied.

Was Thai Khac Chuyen such an agent?

"I believe so," Rheault said. This was the only substantive comment on the case by any of the six officers.

The sudden announcement dismissing the charges came

from Army Secretary Stanley Resor only four days after the Army in Saigon had revealed—over defense objections—details of the charges against the six men scheduled to be brought to trial. It was only on Sept. 18—less than two weeks ago—that the Army announced the men would be tried.

The sudden shift in the Army position—on the grounds that the Central Intelligence Agency refused to make witnesses available—left many people unsatisfied, including some of the defendants.

'SPEAKS FOR ITSELF'

Capt. Robert Marasco, 27, Bloomfield, N.J., named by the Army charges as the triggerman

in the alleged slaying, said of Resor's statement:

"I am not satisfied with his statement, but I don't know what I will do about it."

A spokesman for the military command in Saigon said the Washington announcement "speaks for itself."

The U.S. commander in Vietnam, Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, was on the way to South Korea when the charges were dismissed and probably received a message about it en route, the spokesman said. Abrams slipped out of Vietnam late Sunday to take part in an armed forces celebration in Korea, the spokesman added.

Defense attorneys for the men also learned of the dismissal and gathered at the bachelor officers' quarters where the beer party began before dawn and continued until daylight.

Following the initial notification, however, there was a relatively subdued atmosphere in the quarters as the men strode off to breakfast after dawn.

Official notification came from military authorities at the big army headquarters base at Long Binh, 12 miles northeast of Saigon 24 hours after the first report from Washington.

The men were officially notified at 5:30 a.m. by the brigade commander of the military police at the Long Binh post. He came by the quarters and spoke to them personally.

Notified separately were CWO2 Edward M. Boyle, of New York City and Sgt. 1.C. Alvin L. Smith Jr., of Naples, Fla., against whom similar charges had been held in abeyance. The Army had declared them immune from the murder and con-

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—AP WIREPHOTO.
THREE OF the other four Green Berets against whom the charges were dropped are (from left) Col. Robert B. Rheault, Chief Warrant Officer Edward M. Boyle and Capt. Budge E. Williams. Not pictured is Sgt. 1. C. Alvin L. Smith Jr.

spiracy charges and defense attorneys said the Army planned to use their testimony against the other men.

Capt. Robert F. Marasco, 27, of Bloomfield, N.J. said he was informed through his congressmen, Rep. Peter W. Rodino Jr., D-N.J., that the announcement of their release was also made on the floor of Congress "and was received with a standing ovation."

RESTRAINTS LIFTED

Immediately upon official word to the Green Berets that the charges were dismissed, military authorities lifted all restraints which had been imposed on the men. They still

stayed together and went as a group to breakfast.

Asked whether he thought the men would stay in the Army after their ordeal, Rheault said he could not speak for the others but said "their decisions may certainly be colored by this incident."

He said several of his comrades were near the end of their service obligations and had expressed the intention to leave the Army before the murder case developed.

As for himself, the West Point-trained career officer from Vineyard Haven, Mass., said, "I withhold judgment."

The slender, blond and crew-cut colonel paused a moment. "It's been quite a nightmare. This is like waking up from it," he said.

DAILY EXERCISES

During their confinement the crack Green Berets had been allowed daily exercise. They did a lot of jogging around the big base and all looked in excellent physical condition. Rheault was asked if he had lost weight during the confinement.

"My weight hasn't changed in 20 years. Basically I'm just lean and nasty," said the man who had commanded the 3,000 Green Berets in Vietnam for one

month before the murder and conspiracy charges were leveled.

A spokesman for the U.S. Army headquarters in Vietnam said the official message from Secretary Resor was received at 5 a.m. Saigon time. The message was addressed to Maj. Gen. George L. Mabry, commander of support troops in Vietnam who was the convening authority in the case.

An information copy also was sent to Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, commander of all U.S. forces in Vietnam.

TEXT OF MESSAGE

The one-paragraph message said:

"Acting as a superior convening authority under the provisions of article 22, uniform code of military justice, I hereby assume jurisdiction over and hereby dismiss the courts-martial charges against Col. Rheault, Majors Crew and Middleton, captains Brumley, Marasco and Williams, EW2 Boyle, an Sgt. 1.C. Smith, alleging conspiracy to murder in the murder of one Chuyen on or about 20 June 1969. From Secretary of the Army Resor."

An army spokesman said all the men "were officially notified that they were released from confinement" within 40 minutes of the arrival of Resor's message.

"They are not under charges. They are not under confinement, they are free agents," the spokesman said.

He said the men would be flown back to the United States, possibly later Tuesday.

Green Berets Freed of Murder Charge



THESE ARE PHOTOS of four of the eight Green Berets, against whom charges have been dropped by the U.S. Army in the case involving the alleged drugging and killing of

a South Vietnamese. They are (from left) Capt. Robert F. Marasco, Maj. David E. Crew, Maj. Thomas C. Middleton Jr. and Capt. Leland J. Brumley.

—AP WIREPHOTO.