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Ex-Beret Says He Killed Agent on Orders of C.I.A.

By JOHN DARNTON

Robert F. Marasco, one of the eight Green Berets who were charged but never tried in the slaying two years ago of a South Vietnamese suspected to have been a double agent, says that he shot and killed the man on "oblique yet very, very clear orders" from the Central Intelligence Agency.

"He was my agent and it was my responsibility to eliminate him with extreme prejudice," Mr. Marasco said in an interview Friday. "Eliminate with extreme prejudice" is the Special Forces' euphemism for a killing.

The "elimination" was approved "up and down our chain of command," the former Army captain added. Although he corroborated details of the slaying, he refused to divulge the names of other persons involved.

Mr. Marasco, now 29 years old and a life insurance salesman in Bloomfield, N. J., said

that he was admitting his complicity out of a sense of anger over the conviction of First Lieut. William L. Calley Jr. on charges of premeditated murder in the deaths of 22 civilians at Mylai.

His statements coincide with the publication of a novel called "Court Martial," written jointly by Robin Moore, the author of "The Green Berets," and Henry Rothblatt, the attorney who represented several of the Green Berets arrested in the alleged killing.

The novel is said to be a close rendering of the events that led to the arrest of the Berets, including Col. Robert B. Rheault, then commander of the Army's 3,000 Special Forces personnel in Vietnam. The elite corps, which specializes in counterinsurgency, is still in existence, but is now

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deployed elsewhere, according to the Pentagon.

Six of the eight Berets (charges against to were held in abeyance) were to have stood trial on charges of murder and conspiracy in October, 1969. But the Army abruptly dropped the case on Sept. 29, in a decision reviewed by the Nixon Administration, on the ground that it could not enlist the cooperation of the C.I.A., which had refused to provide witnesses.

The Vietnamese agent was Thai Khac Chuyen, whose body was dropped into the South China Sea off Nhatrang, the Special Forces headquarters 180 miles north of Saigon. Despite intensive dredging, it was apparently never recovered.

Mr. Marasco corroborated the following details, all of which have previously been reported in the press with unnamed sources cited.

Mr. Chuyen's role as a double agent was discovered when a raid on a Vietcong camp turned up a photograph of him with a high-ranking North Vietnamese official. He was told he would be sent on an important mission and instead was held in solitary confinement, where he compromised himself through lie detector tests and sodium pentathol (truth serum).

He was first drugged with morphine and then killed by Mr. Marasco in a motorboat with two shots to the head from a .22-caliber pistol equipped with a silencer (which jammed between shots). His body was tossed overboard in a mail sack weighted with chains and tire rims by the three officers in the boat. This was on June 20, 1969.

A cover story was fabricated in which a Japanese-American fitting Mr. Chuyen's description was sent on an air-supported "secret mission" near the Cambodian border.

The question of what to do with Mr. Chuyen led to meetings between Green Beret officers and C.I.A. officials. The C.I.A. in Saigon finally sent a message reading "return agent to duty" and warning of "flap potential." The message, however, arrived after his death.

Mr. Marasco said Mr. Chuyen was a "principal agent," whose function was to hire, train, pay and coordinate sub-agents on intelligence missions. He refused to give the ultimate aim of the missions and referred the question to a "fact sheet" drawn up by Mr. Moore to publicize his new novel. The "fact sheet" is based on a transcript of the "pre-trial" hearings of the case.

The "fact-sheet" stated that the agent had been involved



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Robert F. Marasco

in a secret Special Forces unit known as B-57, whose goal was to pick military targets in Cambodia for a projected incursion by United States and South Vietnamese forces and to train 3,000 Cambodian troops to guard the country from Communism should Prince Norodom Sihanouk be deposed.

In reality, Mr. Marasco stated, Mr. Chuyen was a triple-agent, whose real allegiance was to an organization led by Gen. Duong Van Minh. The success of this group, which was striving for a coalition government, would have led to "Communist control" and "massive extermination," Mr. Marasco asserted.

When the charges against the Berets were dropped, the Secretary of the Army, Stanley R. Resor, said that the C.I.A. was "not directly involved in the alleged incident."

But Mr. Marasco maintains that a vaguely-worded execution order was passed on to his superior officers in Saigon by a "C.I.A. operative whose cover was a lieutenant-colonel, United States Army." He quoted the wording as: "We cannot officially sanction it, but elimination is your best course of action."

"The C.I.A. does not give written orders," Mr. Marasco said. "When someone in the C.I.A. says to you . . . 'your best course of action is elimination' that means 'we approve it.'"

Mr. Marasco claimed there had been "hundreds" — "and I'm being conservative" — of summary executions in South Vietnam. Most, he said, were carried out by the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit, which he described as an assassination squad of Vietnamese natives "trained, financed and equipped by the C. I. A." But others

were carried out by American "advisers," he said.

Mr. Marasco resigned from the Army on Oct. 14, 1969, and shortly thereafter was injured in a car collision in New Jersey that kept him on a hospital critical list for 10 days.

Because he is no longer in the Army, he is not subject to court-martial. Previously, he has made guarded statements on the killing, but has never before admitted it. He said he is receiving no money from the novel "Court Martial."

Did he regret his actions? "No," he said. "I felt that it was my duty. Anything I did in military duty in Vietnam was with the biggest patriotic motives. I never wake up in the middle of the night screaming."

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