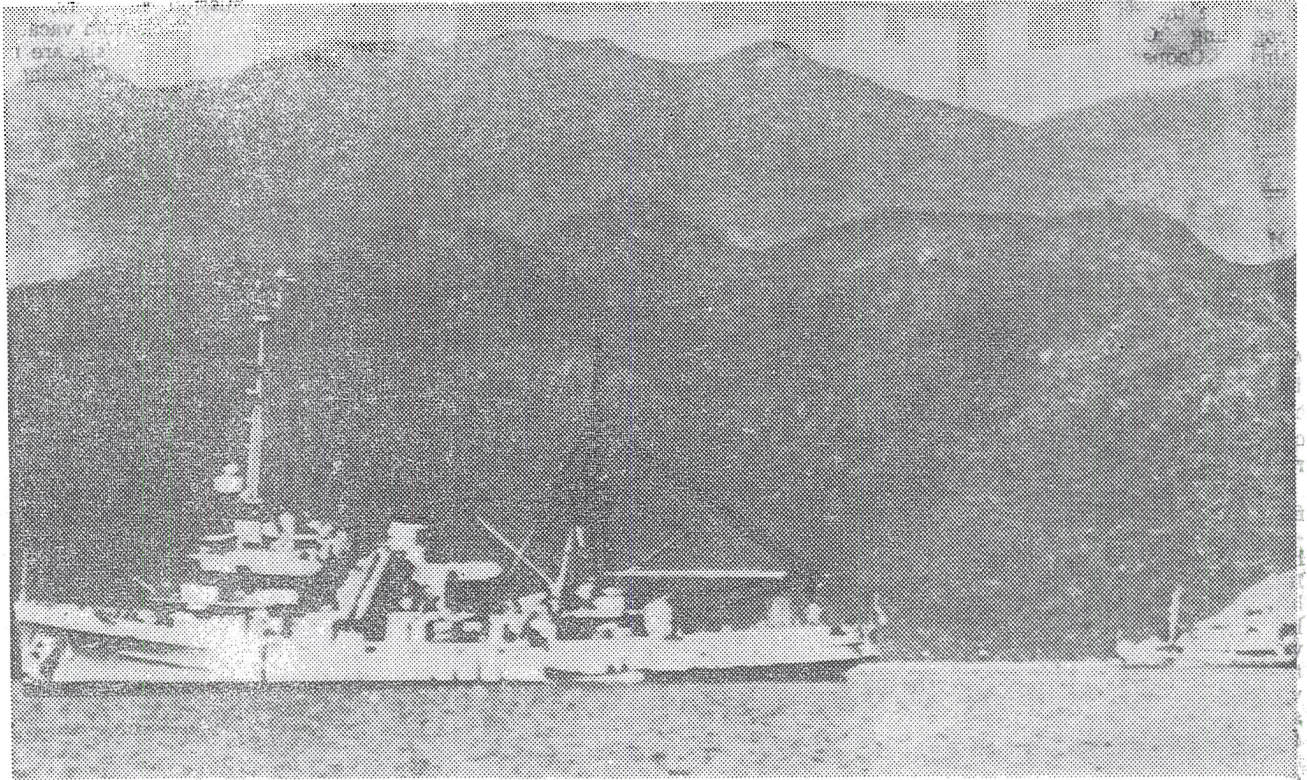


Underwater Hunt for Body in Green Beret Case Reported Abandoned



Associated Press

U.S.S. Chanticleer, one of three ships employed in search for body of Vietnamese agent, in Nhatrang harbor yesterday

By JAMES P. STERBA

Special to The New York Times

CAUDA, South Vietnam, Aug. 10—The officers and men aboard the Woodpecker, one of three ships searching for the body of a purportedly murdered Vietnamese spy, maintained a strict silence today on their operations. In-

formed sources off the ship said, however, that the search was being abandoned today. The Woodpecker, a minesweeper, spent the day looking for the body in a case that has led to the detention of the former commander of the Special Forces, or Green Berets, in South Vietnam and

seven other members of the Fifth Special Forces Group. A pretrial investigation of charges of premeditated murder and conspiracy to commit murder is under way. On board the ship today was a member of the Army's Criminal Investigation Detachment. He wore civilian clothes and

declined to be identified. "I am under direct orders not to say anything to anyone about this case," he said. Nor would the captain of the vessel, Lieut. Victor G. Reiling Jr., discuss the matter. But one source not attached to

Continued on Page 8, Column 1

HUNT ABANDONED IN BERETS CASE

Continued From Page 1, Col. 5

the Woodpecker said: "They called off the mission and they didn't find anybody."

Navy officers with much experience in undersea salvage doubted that the body would ever be found. If it was thrown overboard on June 20—more than seven weeks ago—it would probably have decomposed or been eaten away by the many undersea creatures in these semitropical waters, they said.

"We've recovered bodies down only two days that were only half there," one officer said.

Though the Army has given few details of the case while a pretrial investigation is in progress, it has been reported



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Search of offshore area at Cauda (cross) was ended.

that the investigation centers on allegations that a Vietnamese spy on the American payroll, but working as a double agent, was murdered.

There have been rumors that the agent was shot June 20 and disposed of at sea, his body wrapped in a canvas sack weighted by heavy metal objects. The eight Americans under detention include Col. Robert B. Rheault, former commander of all Special Forces in Vietnam.

New Assignment Set

It became known that the Woodpecker had another assignment beginning tomorrow. The 144-foot vessel, equipped with sensitive underwater sens-

ing devices, initiated the search some time early in July.

She was soon joined by the Conserver, an undersea salvage ship commanded by Lieut. Comdr. Charles N. Goodale, who took charge of the search mission under the direction of the several Criminal Investigation Detachment men on board.

On Aug. 4 the Chanticleer, a submarine rescue ship, arrived from Japan on special assignment.

The Chanticleer is also expected to move to a new assignment tomorrow. The ship was anchored about 300 yards off a Navy coastal patrol station near the tiny fishing hamlet of Cauda, about three miles south of Nhatrang.

2 Vessels on Station

Today the Conserver and the Woodpecker were at their search stations off Hontre Island, between Honmot and Honmun Islands about six miles southeast of Nhatrang and five miles off the mainland.

In this area the sea bottom is covered with a thick layer of mud. The depth of the water ranges from 50 to 200 feet.

The Chanticleer, commanded by Lieut. Comdr. Scott Edwards, was not involved in the search today.

The missing body has been described as essential evidence in the case. According to Washington sources, there is no direct evidence that the agent was in fact killed, though Colonel Rheault, it is alleged, gave his permission to "get rid" of him.

Besides the colonel, those under investigation are Maj. Thomas C. Middleton Jr. of Jefferson, S. C.; Maj. David E. Crew of Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Capt. Leland J. Brumley of Duncan, Okla.; Capt. Budge E. Williams of Athens, Ga.; Capt. Robert F. Marasco of Bloomfield, N. J.; Chief Warrant Officer Edward M. Boyle of New York City and Sgt. 1st Cl. Alvin L. Smith Jr. of Naples, Fla.

Lawyer Reaches Saigon

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Aug. 10 (Reuters)—The civilian lawyer for one of Special Forces officers in the case purportedly involving the slaying of a Vietnamese spy arrived here today and declared he intended to find out why the Army had kept the facts in the case secret.

George Gregory, a 31-year-old South Carolina state senator representing Maj. Thomas C. Middleton, said he had been unable to learn the facts from Army officials in Washington, even though the Pentagon had the facts.

Asked why secrecy had been imposed, the lawyer said, "I don't know, but we'll find that out."