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Beret Case Details Reported in Saigon

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Thursday, Aug. 14—The double agent role of the man who was the victim in the Special Forces murder case was first revealed by photographs that showed him in conversation with North Vietnamese intelligence officers, according to sources close to the investigation.

The man, said to be a Cambodian spy on the American payroll, was reportedly photographed secretly while he was talking with North Vietnamese agents at an undisclosed spot in Cambodia.

The photographs led to the man's subsequent identification as a double agent by the Special Forces prosecution charge of

Continued on Page 3, Column 4

Details in Green Beret Case Reported

Continued From Page 1, Column 7

intelligence operations on both sides of the Cambodian border. The man, a former Green Beret, was charged that he had been killed and dumped into the South China Sea on June 30, 1968, after a naval search for his body was abandoned without success last Sunday. Eight Special Forces soldiers have been arrested in the case and are facing charges of murder, kidnapping and conspiracy to commit murder. They include Col. Robert R. Rife, the former commander of the Special Forces soldiers in South Vietnam, and five other officers, and two enlisted men. The army has also announced that the man, Chu Ven Thai Khac, has been held. The following account of the incident has been obtained from various sources close to the investigation:

After Special Forces intelligence officers viewed the photographs indicating that the agent was cooperating with the enemy, the man was picked up and subjected to intense interrogation. A polygraph test was administered and sodium pentathol, a truth serum, was used. The interrogation confirmed that the man was a double agent. He was known as Chu Ven Thai Khac, though that may not be his real name.

He was one of some 300 non-American agents employed by

the Special Forces to carry out intelligence missions in areas held predominantly by the enemy.

His status as a double agent was reportedly confirmed by the Central Intelligence Agency, which, according to the sources, suggested that he either be isolated or "terminated with extreme prejudice." This term is said to be an intelligence euphemism for execution.

In Washington, Government sources denied this week that the CIA had had any connection whatever with the case.

The action against the agent is said to have been carried out by putting him into a state of unconsciousness with medication, then holding and then dumping him with a .45-caliber pistol equipped with a silencer. The body was apparently weighted with chains and dropped into the sea somewhere off Nha Trang, the Special Forces headquarters, 160 miles north of Saigon.

Order Reported Revoked

A few days later, for reasons the sources are unwilling to explain, the C.I.A. directive was reportedly revoked, a new order directed that he was to be spared.

The incident was reported to Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, the commander of American forces in South Vietnam. General Abrams directed a thorough investigation of the events.

During this inquiry, the de-

fendants were flown to Saigon separately and interrogated on the reported roles of the other men in the case. Their stories were painstakingly cross-checked by the Army's Criminal Investigation Division. Late in July, about a month after the incident occurred, the men were jailed.

There is still no clear indication why the reported order to dispose of the agent was revoked or why the Army elected to press charges against the men. Military sources say that double agents are often uncovered by Special Forces men and Central Intelligence agents. In most cases, the double agents are turned over to the South Vietnamese military.

There is no ready explanation of why General Abrams became involved in the case.

The Army's investigation is continuing and is expected to take at least another week or more. A number of witnesses from the Special Forces group are being summoned to testify, as well as agents of the C.I.A.

When the investigation is complete, formal charges may be preferred against the men. If they are, a general court-martial will be held. Under ordinary circumstances, such a trial would be open to the public. However, the Army may elect to close the court-martial on the grounds that matters of national security are involved.