

A Talk With Family of 'Beret Victim'

Times-Post Service

Saigon

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, The Washington Post learned early today.

Unless descriptions offered by the victim's wife and brother 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 his name, Chu Ven Thai Khac, was released Friday night by George Gregory, an attorney for one of the eight green berets accused of murder 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 late yesterday. It fits together almost perfectly with facts of the case that have already been confirmed.

MOVE

Also yesterday, the army announced that the eight suspects in the case had been moved from maximum security solitary confinement into air-conditioned quarters loosely guarded by MPs. The move followed protests from U.S. congressmen about the army's treatment of the suspects, who have not yet been formally charged.

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 Moc Hoa in Kien Tuong 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

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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 Vietnamese officer who searched his house.

QUIZ

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, the "truth serum.")

On the morning of June 13, Chuyen went off again to Camp Goodman. He told his wife, she said yesterday, 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.

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 Moc Hoa, just outside a section of Cambodia that is heavily used by Viet Cong troops.

VALLEY

Chuyen went to work for the Green Berets in December 1965, his family said. He served first in the A Shau valley area near the Laotian border in northern South Vietnam. Later he worked in Tay Ninh province, which adjoins Cambodia, then in Can Tho in the Mekong Delta, and finally in Moc Hoa.

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 Thanh Hoa province in what is now North Vietnam.

Chuyen's wife said yesterday that if her husband is dead, she is 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.

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 employe in these photos.

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 confirmed that the suspect was working for the Communists.

With this information, the Berets apparently approached the 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 pretrial investigation of the eight men and any subsequent court-martial, if charges are pressed. The 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 the Berets interpreted as meaning they should kill him.

According to a source close to the defense, the Berets asked the agency 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 Berets contend there is no case against their clients.

A second civilian attorney, Henry B. Rothblatt of New York, entered the case yesterday. Rothblatt, who has written two books on criminal law with attorney 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.