

Apparent Beret Victim And a Spying Mystery

Saigon

The wife and brother of the apparent victim in the Green Beret murder case said yesterday they doubted that the man was a spy or agent. "If the CIA hired him as a spy," the victim's brother said, "I would lose all respect for the CIA."

They could offer no proof that Thai Khac Chuyen was not a spy, only circumstantial evidence. And Chuyen's brother said it was just possible that Chuyen's temperamental and candid exterior disguised a secret life of intrigue. If he was a spy, "Only God and he will ever know it," his brother — Thai Khac Chuong — told the Washington Post.

Chuong and the victim's wife, Phan Kim Lien, revealed Monday that Chuyen — whom they knew as an interpreter for the American Green Berets — had disappeared June 13. The Pentagon has confirmed that Thai Khac Chuyen was the name of the victim and the Army murder occurred June 20.

Chuyen's brother described him yesterday as a person who angered easily, who always spoke his mind and who could hide nothing. The entire family was staunchly anti-Communist, Chuong said. They fled their native North Vietnam in 1954 on the last boat to carry refugees from communism to the south, Chuong said.

The victim's wife revealed several new details about her husband's interrogation and disappearance in an interview at her parents' modest house in Go Vap, outside Saigon. Dressed in polka dot Vietnamese pajamas, looking pale and exhausted, Mrs. Chuyen said she had been visited just four days ago — on Friday, August 15 — by two Americans dressed in civilian clothes.

The Americans began by

asking if she would like to hear news of her husband. She said yes, of course. The Americans then asked a series of questions about Chuyen's background and activities before he joined the U.S. Special Forces in December, 1965, Mrs. Chuyen said. They never gave her any news of her husband, she added.

Mrs. Chuyen said that the last time she saw her husband — on the night of June 12 — he said he had been questioned with a lie detector about his activities in 1964 and 1965, before he joined the U.S. Special Forces. He was asked if he had gone to North Vietnam in those years, Mrs. Chuyen quoted her husband as saying.

The next morning, June 13, Chuyen left home to report to Camp Goodman, a Special Forces camp in downtown Saigon. He has not been seen or heard from since.

On the night of the 13th, Mrs. Chuyen received a brief letter from her husband carried to her by a Vietnamese soldier. "Darling and two dear sons," it began. (Chuyen left sons aged 1 and 3.) "I am going on a mission for a few days and I will come back. Don't worry about anything. Good health to you and my two sons." The note, which Mrs. Chuyen showed to a reporter yesterday, was signed, "Many kisses."

When he did not come back for several days, Mrs. Chuyen said, she went to Camp Goodman herself to ask about her husband's whereabouts. On that and subsequent visits to the camp she could get no information, she said.

So on June 19, she said, Mrs. Chuyen sent a telegram to her husband addressed to Moc Hoa Special Forces camp, his last known base just below the Cambodian border west of Saigon. The cable said Chuyen's father

was critically ill — a fabrication intended to provoke a speedy reply, Mrs. Chuyen said.

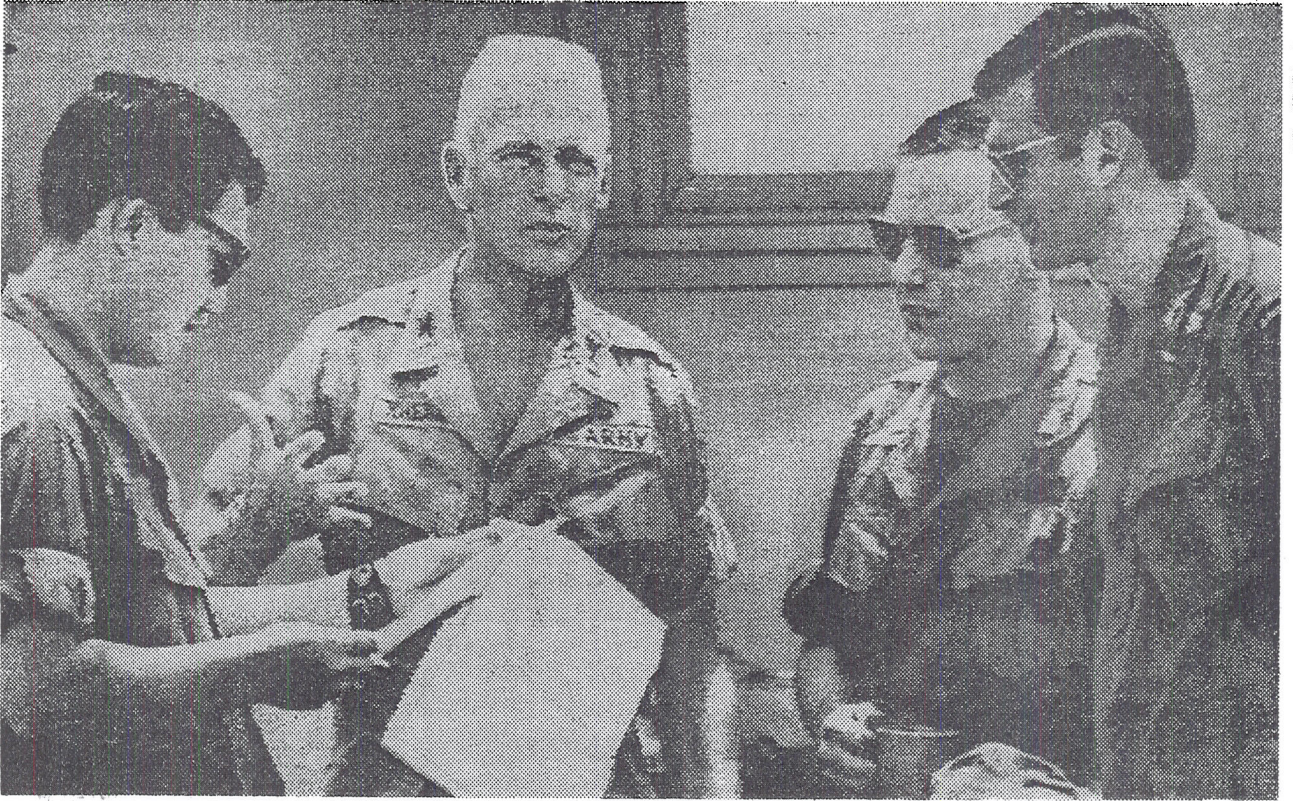
The cable was never answered. Yesterday it arrived at her home in an envelope marked "Department of the Army," apparently belonging to the U.S. Army. The telegram, as it had arrived in Moc Hoa nearly two months earlier, had been sent to her in the Vietnamese mail on August 15.

Today the Army's "Article 32" investigation into the alleged murder is due to reconvene at the Long Binh Army base just north of Saigon. This investigation will determine whether Colonel Robert Rheault, former commander of the Green Berets in Vietnam and seven other officers will go on trial for Chuyen's murder.

Yesterday the suspects in the case were made available — at a distance — to photographers. They have all been moved from solitary confinement to air conditioned quarters loosely guarded by MPs.

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Preparing for Probe



AP Wirephoto

A military attorney, at left, conferred yesterday in Long Binh with three of the Green Berets charged with murder—Colonel Robert Rheault, Warrant Officer Edward Boyle and Captain Robert Marasco.

