

# Green Beret Officer's Wife Keeps an Uneasy Vigil

By NAN ROBERTSON

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OAK BLUFFS, Mass., Aug. 22 — It is 12 hours and 9,000 miles from here to Longbinh, South Vietnam, and Mrs. Robert B. Rheault sits in the only permanent home she has known since her marriage 22 years ago.

The shingled house is nestled in a pine grove on Martha's Vineyard and has a sweeping view of a great lagoon. Despite the peace and seclusion she has here, Mrs. Rheault said she was smoking far too many cigarettes these days, and she flinches when the telephone rings.

Usually it is a reporter calling to ask how she feels about her husband, the former commander of the Special Forces, or Green Berets, in Vietnam, now under arrest with seven others and facing a possible court-martial in the slaying of a Vietnamese identified as a double agent. Mrs. Rheault's older daughter, Susanne, authoritatively fends off the callers.

The blond Mrs. Rheault was well-born and is well-spoken. The former Caroline Anna Young, who has been called Nan since she was little, "because there were so many Carolines in the family," was raised in Garden City, L.I., and New Canaan, Conn.

She speaks anxiously about her 43-year-old husband, of whose innocence she is convinced, and wants "nothing less than complete vindication" for him, his men and the Special Forces.

Mrs. Rheault (pronounced roe) displayed a determined personality during a two-hour interview here, but she said she and her three children were frequently afflicted by depression. "We have tremendous ups and downs," she said.

She said she did not want to jeopardize her husband's case by "any pushiness on my part." But last Sunday Mrs. Rheault went with a lawyer friend to the summer home here of Senator Edward W. Brooke of Massachusetts to seek his support. The Republican Senator, she reported, said he would "see what he could do" and asked for a written summary of the lawyer's presentation.

Mrs. Rheault said she had not asked for help from the Democratic Senator from Massachusetts, Edward M. Kennedy, who issued a sympathetic statement on the case several days ago.

## Letters of Support

She added that she had received "hundreds and hundreds" of letters from strangers, "not a single one adverse," since the case became public a month ago. Mrs. Rheault described these as her "adrenalin," and said that her spirits were lifted twice a day—when the mail comes in.

She writes the colonel every day, sending on samples of the mail, and receives a daily letter from her husband. But she is afraid their mail is read by others, if not censored, and she said she is getting paranoid about the telephone. She now fears it may be tapped. At least one cablegram Colonel Rheault sent her recently never arrived.

A product of the Chapin School and Vassar College, a painter and former fashion model, daughter of a Wall Street broker, Mrs. Rheault is nothing like the movie stereotype of an Army wife. She said she had inherited her creative talent from her mother, a painter whose maiden and professional name was Susanne Bottomley.

The Vineyard house is full of Mrs. Rheault's attractive paintings, mostly seascapes. She is proud of what she calls her one real talent — the ability to sketch a good likeness of a person within 20 minutes. As a hospital volunteer on Okinawa last year she made 200 such sketches for wounded servicemen to send to their families.

One of Mrs. Rheault's brothers, Thomas, is a sculptor. The other, Lawrence, is a newspaper editor.

Mrs. Rheault met her husband—the son of a French-Canadian who was a captain in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police before becoming a prosperous financial adviser—on a blind date in the spring of 1946.

She was ending her freshman year at Vassar; he was about to graduate from the United States Military Academy at West Point after education at Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, N. H. and the Brooks School in North Andover, Mass.

A year later, just short of her 20th birthday, she was married to Lieutenant Rheault. It was, she said, a huge wedding in St. James' Episcopal Church in New York; reception was at the Cosmopolitan Club. "I stood

in line for hours and hours," Mrs. Rheault remembers. "But Daddy wanted it. I was his only daughter."

There followed the wandering life of an Army family—in West Germany, where she learned "hausfrau-Deutsch;" in Paris, where her husband studied the language and French culture at the Sorbonne and she perfected her accent at the Alliance Francaise; at West Point, where Colonel Rheault taught French; and at bases and Army colleges in Kansas, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Washington. Finally, last year, the Rheaults went to Okinawa. Then, in May, Colonel Rheault became commander of the Fifth Special Forces Group in Vietnam.

Mrs. Rheault had to remain behind—dependents are not permitted in South Vietnam—with her daughters, Susanne, 20, and Michelle, 17, and her son, Robert B. Jr., 11.

To a visitor here, she said sadly: "I'm afraid if I say anything I will jeopardize my husband. I'm afraid if I don't say anything I will jeopardize him. But he is innocent of the charges that were made."

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