

NYTimes, received by mail, did not carry this story. Included in some other edition, or not carried at all by the Times itself?

15th Year No. 240

★★★★

Sf. Chron. FRIDAY, AUGUST 29, 1969

Murder and Espionage

See also SFChronicle, 30 Aug, Laurence Stern.

CIA Version of Beret Case

By Benjamin Welles
New York Times

Washington

After weeks of strict silence, the Central Intelligence Agency is making known its own version of the Special Forces murder-and-espionage case.

In private talks here with newsmen, high CIA officials are seeking to rebut charges of complicity in the alleged murder of Thai Khac Chuyen, a South Vietnamese suspected of double-crossing the Army's Special Forces, or Green Berets.

Chuyen's disappearance in June has touched off an Army investigation that could lead to a court-martial of eight Special Forces soldiers, including Colonel Robert B. Rheault, former commander of all Special Forces troops in South Vietnam, on charges of murder and conspiracy. The findings of a pretrial investigation — similar to a grand-jury hearing — are expected soon.

The CIA officials are now furnishing dates, names, facts and figures in an effort to show that the agency repeatedly warned the Special

Forces in South Vietnam against taking the life of the suspected double agent.

The information is also intended to suggest that even after the reported slaying, Secretary of the Army Stanley R. Resor and General Creighton W. Abrams, commander of U.S. Forces in South Vietnam, declined to issue statements clearing the Central Intelligence Agency.

Richard C. Helms, CIA director and President Nixon's chief intelligence adviser, is normally one of the most tight-lipped officials in the top echelon of the govern-

ment. However, the device of the background meeting with newsmen, at which officials can unburden themselves without fear of being identified, is widely used when one government agency or department feels it is being unjustly maligned in the press by the action or inaction of another.

Officially, the CIA, the Defense Department and the Army are still refusing all comment on the case. But recent reports from Saigon, quoting "sources close to the case" — widely believed to

See Back Page

The CIA Version of Green Beret Story

From Page 1

be Special Forces personnel — have repeatedly said that the CIA ordered the killing of Chuyen.

The body, it is said, was dropped in a weighted bag off the South Vietnamese coast soon after he was killed June 20 or 21. The Navy has used dredging, frogmen, sonar and other devices in an unsuccessful effort to recover it.

VERSION

The CIA version of the case, as related in the last 48 hours is as follows:

At least a year ago members of a Senate-House committee that supervises CIA activities and annual budget needs suggested to Helms that the agency end its long-standing association in South Vietnam with the special forces and, generally, remove itself from operational as distinct from intelligence-gathering functions. Orders to that effect followed.

However, the CIA account runs, on June 12 officers of the Fifth Special Forces group in Nha Trang approached former colleagues in the agency with a request for advice and assistance.

AGENT

A Vietnamese agent whom they did not immediately identify was, they said, under suspicion as a possible double agent for the North Vietnamese. He had been employed by the Special Forces as an interpreter and leader of an indigenous team assigned to watching enemy infiltration and troop movements on the Laotian border.

The Special Forces officers intimated they were weighing the possibility of killing the agent as a traitor and as a grave security risk to their



THAI KHAC CHUYEN
CIA said 'don't kill him'

other operations. They asked the CIA for its advice, and whether it might take the agent off their hands, confining him in some "safe haven," possibly outside Vietnam.

The agency's representative in Nha Trang is said then to have queried his superiors in Saigon and to have been told emphatically not to offer facilities for harboring the agent but to urge the Special Forces not to kill him.

PHOTO

Agency sources insist that they have no knowledge of a photograph—widely reported in the press — that allegedly showed the agent in conversation with North Vietnamese intelligence personnel and that is said to have set off the Special Forces' suspicions.

On June 16, the agency maintains, the Special Forces identified the agent for the first time as Thai Khac Chuyen. By then Special Forces officers had

made it clear that they had virtually decided to "terminate" his employment — a euphemism for assassination.

On June 18, the CIA sources continue, the agency offered to trace Chuyen through its own files and once more urged the Special Forces in Nha Trang not to kill him but to wait until the agency had had time to decide whether he might be fitted into one of its operations.

ALERT

By this time the agency's office in Saigon had alerted Army headquarters to the implications of the case and interest was mounting.

However, on June 21, the agency contends, both the CIA and Army authorities were assured by the Special Forces officers in Nha Trang that Chuyen had been sent on a "high-risk, sensitive mission to North Vietnam."

It was not until nine days later, according to the agency, that the truth emerged. A Special Forces Sergeant, Alvin L. Smith Jr. of Naples, Fla., a member of the Nha Trang Special Forces detachment, voluntarily approached the CIA office in Nha Trang, reported that Chuyen had been killed by the Special Forces and asked for protection.

FEAR

He said he had opposed the killing, the CIA says, and was fearful for his own life because, as he put it, he was dealing with a "bunch of wild men."

At this point, the CIA continues, its representative in Nha Trang allowed Smith to stay on its premises overnight and alerted its Saigon office. The next morning two agents of the Army's Crimi-

When the eight men were released 18 Aug from military stockade, CW02 Boyle was confined with the six commissioned officers in an officers' billet. Sgt. Smith was held in enlisted men's billet. (SF Examiner 18 Aug 69.) (NY TIMES 19 AUG)

nal Investigation Division arrived and took Smith to Saigon.

Soon afterward, Abrams ordered a full-scale investigation and the seven other Special Forces men involved — all officers — were arrested and interrogated. All seven, according to the CIA, lied about what had happened.

EVENTS

However, this version continues, after prolonged isolation and intensive interrogation, all seven changed their account of the events.

What part Rheault played is not clear. One version here is that he assumed full responsibility for the actions of his subordinates and insisted on being arrested with them.

A CIA representative was permitted by the Army authorities in Saigon to testify on the agency's non-involvement during the preliminary hearings. However, the agency's approaches to Abrams to issue a public statement absolving the CIA of complicity in the case — and particularly in the alleged murder — were reportedly rebuffed.

PENTAGON

Furthermore, agency officials here conferred at length at the Pentagon with Secretary Resor and with his deputy, Thaddeus R. Beal, urging a public econeration of the CIA and again were turned down.

Resor flew to Saigon August 18 on what was described as a routine visit to Army installations in Asia. The Pentagon confirmed that he would review the details of the Special Forces case with Abrams during his stop in Vietnam.

In addition to Rheault, of Vineyard Haven, Mass., those arrested were Major Thomas E. Middleton of Jefferson, S.C.; Major David E. Crew of Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Captain Leland J. Brumley of Duncan, Okla., and Captain Budge E. Williams of Athens, Ga.; Captain Robert F. Marsco of Bloomfield, N.J.; Chief Warrant Officer Edward M. Boyle of New York and Sergeant 1st Class Alvin L. Smith Jr. of Naples, Fla.