

S.F. Chronicle 30 Aug 69

Saigon's Concern

# How Beret Case Reflects on U.S.

**Saigon**

The Vietnamese press has been giving full play to the Green Beret case, linking it to the arrests of a group of alleged spies who are said to have infiltrated President Nguyen Van Thieu's inner circles.

Papers here have been running front-page headlines about certain defense allegations which credit the CIA with more than 100 assassinations of Vietnamese nationals in the past year.

Up to now, however, only political people have made an issue of the case. The common people have treated it more as a James Bond adventure (spy movies are the most popular movies in South Vietnam and a recent poll of Saigon high school students showed more wanted to be secret agents than anything else.)

"Do you think we need this case to tell that the CIA kills people?" said a young draftee who had paid an \$80 bribe to be transferred to Saigon. "Do you think we have to be told our lives are not worth anything?"

Vietnamese intellectuals, however, are disturbed by

the case. A Saigon University professor, Chau tam Luan, said: "We can see that the Americans deny everything — assassinations, terror, chemical and biological warfare — but we see that everything they deny ends up to be true . . . There is a credibility gap between the U.S. and the world."

It is common knowledge here that bands of mercenaries, called "Provincial Reconnaissance Units," led by American CIA employees swoop down on hamlets in the countryside every day to "eliminate with extreme prejudice" National Liberation Front suspects kept on confidential blacklists in connection with a Vietnamese-American "infrastructure eradication" program called "Phoenix."

Everyone knows that the civil rights guaranteed by South Vietnam's constitution are meaningless when the Americans, protected least of all by their extraterritoriality, and Vietnamese powers-that-be, protected by the Americans, choose to ignore them.

Concluded the pro-government Saigon daily, the Vietnam Guardian: "It is the sort of affair most people would rather read about in fiction or history books rather than in current events reports. It's easier on the conscience that way."