

Berets' Reaction

Celebration in Long Binh

Long Binh

Six Green Beret officers freed of murder charges in the death of an alleged Vietnamese double agent jubilantly staged a pre-dawn barracks beer party today and prepared to fly home tonight.

They gathered outside the sprawling Long Binh post on Saigon's suburbs and happily talked to newsmen, giving the thumbs up sign and loudly playing "The Ballad of the Green Berets" on a small tape recorder.

"The outcome we never do-

buted at any time. The only question was how long and how difficult it would be to prove the point," said Colonel Robert Rheault, the trim, 43-year-old West Pointer who was commander of the special Forces troops in Vietnam until he was placed un-

der arrest two months ago.

CELEBRATION

When the news came unofficially from Washington early today, Rheault woke up his comrades and they had the beer party in celebration. A MILITARY Police officer showed up 2½ hours later

showed up 2½ hours later with the official confirmation.

Rheault said he would withhold judgment on whether to stay in the army. Some of the other officers were planning to get out.

"The agony our families had to suffer was brought to a close. We consider ourselves tough cookies, but it was difficult for our families," Rheault said.

Asked if there actually had been a double agent in the Special Forces, Rheault replied: "There was a penetration agent, yes."

What was a penetration agent, Rheault was asked. An enemy who came in under the guise of a friend, the colonel replied.

Was Thai Khac Chuyen — the alleged victim — such an agent?

"I believe so," Rheault said. "War is a tough and dangerous business."

This was the only substantive comment on the case by any of the six officers.

SWITCH

The sudden shift in the Army position — on the grounds that the Central Intelligence Agency refused to make witnesses available — left many people unsatisfied, including some of the defendants.

Captain Robert Marasco, 27, Bloomfield, N.J., named by the Army charges as the triggerman in the alleged slaying, said of Army Secretary Stanley Resor's statement:

"I am not satisfied with his statement, but I don't know what I will do about it."

But Marasco said will seek an immediate release from the service.

In the United States, the men's families and supporters were jubilant.

'DAMAGE'

In Brookline, Mass., Rheault's wife expressed happiness "because it means an end to the agony these men and their families have endured all this time."

She said the whole affair "certainly has done damage to the cause of military justice in general," and accused the government of having a double standard of justice — one for soldiers and another for secret agents.

"If a CIA member gets a special mission he gets special immunities — when a Special Forces man is given the same mission, they throw him to the wolves."

"I know, I know; I've got to listen," said Marasco's mother, Mrs. Frank Marasco, as she sat by a radio at her home in Bloomfield, N.J.

Last week Mrs. Marasco

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UPI Telephoto

MRS. ROBERT RHEAULT
"End to the agony"

had declared: "I don't care if my son or any other mother's son killed this double agent, the boys were acting under orders. This is war."

In Baltimore, Md., the wife of Chief Warrant Officer Edward Boyle said: "I'm very, very happy that it's over with. I was confident that it would turn out okay."

"This is what we wanted in the first place," said Attorney Henry B. Rothblatt in San Francisco. "The Army knew these men did nothing wrong."

Rothblatt, a defense counsel in the case, added: "The Central Intelligence Agency has always been very much in this. If these men are restored honorably to duty with all credit coming to them, there will be no reverberations. But if there is the slightest black mark against them, there certainly could be."