

see also
"Behind the intelligence
curtain," by
Joseph B. Treaster,
NYTimes 1 Oct 69,
this file.

The Ghostly War of the Green Berets

by HORACE SUTTON

SAIGON.
If you stand on the sand and look straight out into the South China Sea without letting your eye fall upon any of the scaffolding of war, then there is a certain tattered splendor about the Bay of Nhatrang.

The parabolas of the islands, so close to shore and so remindful of Sugar Loaf, stand out in black silhouette in the quietude of late afternoon. The clouds hang low and the slope-masted canoe bends into the breeze on its homeward way. The picnic tables fringed with palm frond canopies are empty now, and it's too dark to play the miniature golf course that some zealous morale officer has built on the beach to give this place a hopeless whiff of Atlantic City. There is activity in the sinister blockhouse behind the barbed wire at the sea's edge, and the marine green trucks bounce in and out of the potholes along the beach road, past the peeling villas that are left over from those expansive colonial days when the French journeyed the 188 miles from the dust and clatter and heat of Saigon to make believe they had found Trouville in Southeast Asia.

It was here on this beach, under the shade of darkness last June 20th, that a captain in the Green Berets, Robert Marasco, who is twenty-seven and whose home is in Bloomfield, New Jersey, is said to have pushed off in a J-boat used by scuba divers bound for the deep waters of the bay. He was accompanied by other members of

the Special Forces command, whose headquarters in Vietnam is ten minutes from the beach at Nhatrang. They carried the inert form of Thai Khac Chuyen, a Vietnamese national heavily dosed with morphine. Far out in Nhatrang Bay, Chuyen was allegedly shot, his body placed in a sack weighted with chains and smeared with blood to bring the sharks and dumped into the depths of the South China Sea.

The disposal of a lone agent or a double agent, as Chuyen was said to have been, has been repeated in one form or another in this and other wars. Yet, on this occasion it created what threatened to be, until the President finally quashed the case, the major scandal of the Vietnam war, wrecking brilliant careers, dispiriting an elite corps, venting intraservice jealousies, fanning hatreds, confusing allies, confounding friendly embassies, stretching public patience, and imparting boundless joy to the common enemy.

More than all that perhaps, it has laid bare an enormous American intelligence effort, with agencies competing against each other for the same snippets of information. So acute has the rivalry become that agencies have deliberately fouled each other's lines, obscuring the common goal of victory in the war. Proponents of a free society may view all this and ask themselves whether such black arts are essential to their safety. They may wonder, too, just what is the proper code of conduct for soldiers who have been

recruited and trained specifically for what is so euphemistically called "unconventional warfare."

Although Secretary of the Army Stanley R. Resor, in dismissing the charges against the Green Berets, said, "the acts which were charged but not proved, represent a fundamental violation of Army regulations, orders, and principles," there are apparently many interpretations of these principles.

A letter which Captain Marasco wrote to his wife on July 24 from his cell at Longbinh jail indicated that an operation on which he had been working had been compromised and that one of his people was suspected of being a North Vietnamese agent. "Suffice to say we determined his guilt. . . . There were numerous reasons why we couldn't let him go, so the powers decided to do away with him. Being the people involved, it was up to us to come up with a plan and execute it. We followed through with it thinking that the proper coordination had been made and that this was a military operation."

The Green Berets can trace their modus operandi back to the National Security Council, which meets with the President and sets the national policy on intelligence operations. The general operational direction is passed by NSC to the Joint Chiefs, who write a Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan, known as JSCAP. Each of the services—Army, Navy, and Air Force—then adapts its own version. One section of the plan is said to deal specifically with unconventional warfare and spells out the extreme measures that

may be required in black warfare.

This overall plan is ultimately passed down to those who will implement its trusts, in the form of a secret field manual and in the courses that are taught to the Special Forces in its training school at Fort Bragg. Says one former Beret officer: "Men begin to accept these theories as a way of life. The government turns these guys into killers. Some may round the bend quicker than others. But the Army can't disown these men if they are caught. The United States must assume responsibility for these peoples' actions because they enticed them into it in the first place." A Green Beret sergeant, now in Vietnam, recalls having been taught the torture methods in use by the Chinese, Russians, North Koreans, and North Vietnamese: "We

were being told what to expect, but it is entirely possible that some of our people got the wrong idea from the lessons."

While elements of America's "open society" rue the black arts of espionage and its attendant skills, secret service goes back at least as far as the Egyptians, 5,000 years ago. American and British intelligence systems are based on the British secret service that was started by, of all people, Daniel Defoe, who, in pursuit of more acceptable endeavors, wrote a book called *Robinson Crusoe*. For its part, the United States got into the business of positive intelligence, that is, finding out about the enemy, with the formation of the Office of Strategic Services in the early part of World War II. While General Eisenhower did credit

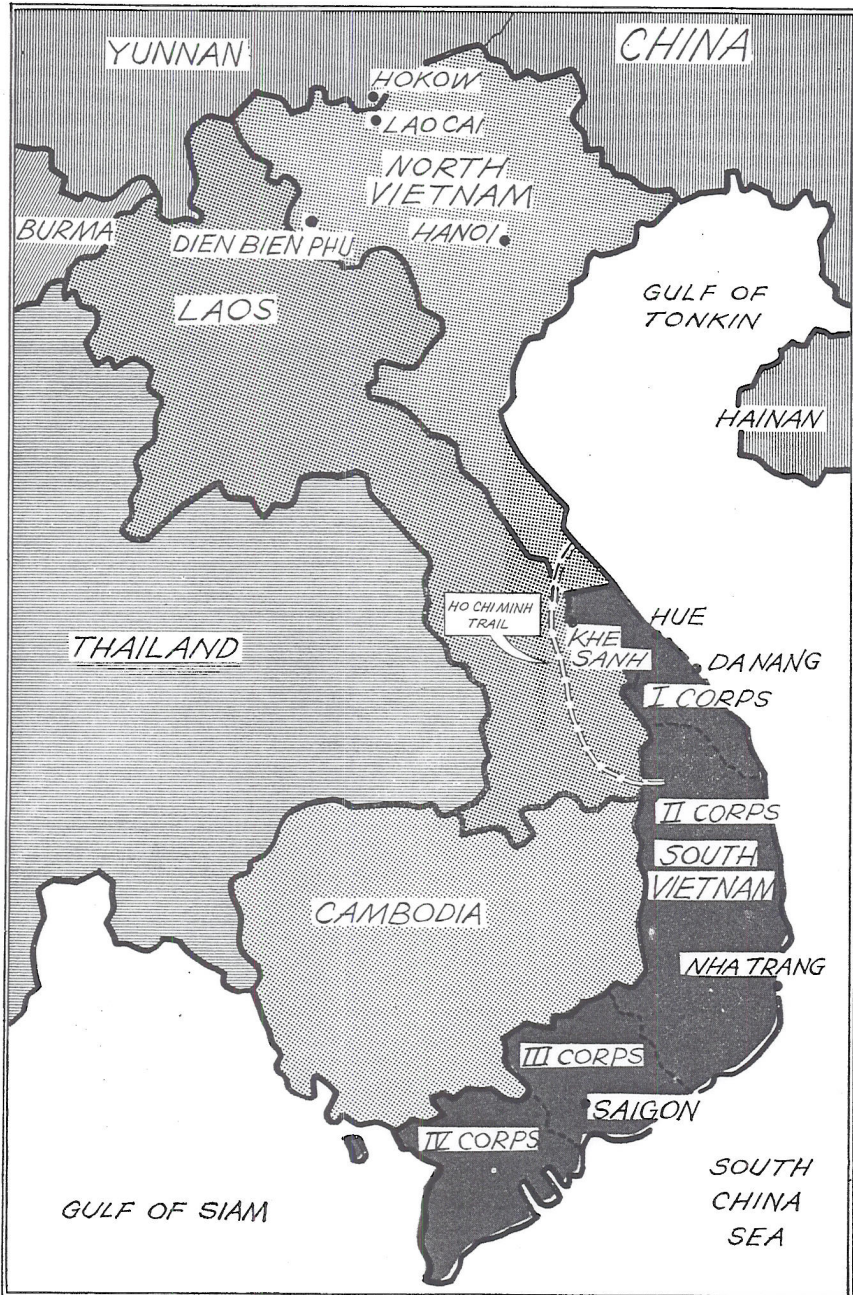
the OSS with helping to tie down five German divisions during the Normandy invasion through its aid to the resistance, both the Army's Counter Intelligence Corps, which had been given special equipment and special training, and the highly covert OSS often incurred hostility, harassment, and the high suspicion of conventional warfare officers.

If the CIA can be said to have grown from World War II's OSS detachments, then the Green Berets descended from the Rangers, those rough and ready troops who scaled the impossible cliffs of Pointe du Hoc in Normandy on D-Day, and from a joint U.S.-Canadian commando group known as the First Special Service Force, which fought in the Aleutians and France.

The First Special Forces Group was organized at Fort Bragg on June 20, 1952, oddly enough, seventeen years to the day before the ill-fated incident at Nhatrang. Forces were deployed to Germany and Japan, but during the Eisenhower years the wearing of the green beret was strictly unauthorized. They were discovered again by President Kennedy, whose favorite they became.

Having read Mao and Che Guevara, President Kennedy could see very clearly the advantages of counterinsurgency warfare, which is the very essence of the Green Beret tactic. Moreover, their professionalism, their élan, and their dash appealed to his sense of romanticism. He gave them back their berets, rekindled their *esprit*, beefed up their forces, and became their patron saint. When he died, a green beret was placed beside his grave, where it still remains, and some of the patches worn by Beret groups were changed from white to black in permanent mourning. The Green Berets' home base became known as the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Center for Special Warfare (in Army patois, USAJFKCENSPWAR). If that seemed too jingoistic, the name was changed in May to the John F. Kennedy Center for Military Assistance.

Volunteers, jumpers, linguists, soldiers highly romanticized in book and ballad, they became the strong-arm troops of the CIA. It was they who gathered intelligence in the field for the CIA when the United States sent a stabilizing force into the Dominican Republic. They were committed to Saigon in 1961 when it was thought a small contingent of Berets working with local troops would make the involvement of masses of combat ground forces unnecessary. When two Green Berets were killed early in April 1962, they were the first Ameri-

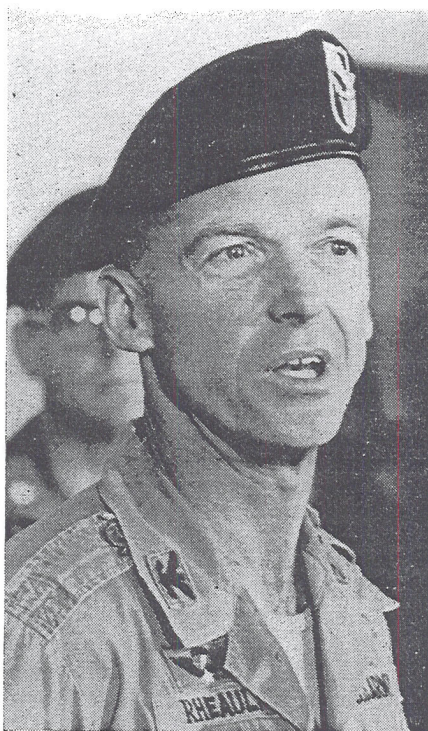


can casualties of the Vietnam conflict. Since then they have lost 500 dead, every name inscribed on a highly polished brass plate displayed at the entranceway to their headquarters command at Nhatrang. Among the darkest days of their history, aside from the assassination of John F. Kennedy, was the night of February 7, 1968, when their camp at Longvei outside of Khesanh, held by fourteen Berets and a force of irregulars, was overrun in the night by North Vietnamese regulars using Soviet tanks.

Since 1962, however, they have won six medals of honor, fifty-three distinguished service crosses, and 517 silver stars. After the death of President Kennedy, the Berets were, for the most part, switched from CIA to the control of the Army. Their per diem allowance, highly coveted and highly envied by regular troops, was abolished, but they were allowed to keep their berets. Three groups remain at Fort Bragg, but the Berets also operate in Okinawa, Fort Devens, Massachusetts (a group that maintains a detachment in Germany), in Panama (where they worked with the Bolivian Army in dispatching the high priest of insurgency, Che Guevara), and in Thailand.

In Vietnam, a force still remains detached to CIA, participating in the highly specialized SOG operations. Acronyms are very popular in the Vietnam war, and SOG stands for Study and Observations Group, responsible directly to MAC-V, the most high-flown of all acronymic groups, the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. Working out of a guarded house on Cong-ly Street alongside the Italian Embassy, SOG studies and observes the customs of the Vietcong along the Laos border. It flies its own planes, usually Vietnamese-piloted helicopters. Its teams are said to carry British weapons with silencers. They are equipped to drop electronic sensors along the trails that lead down from the north that will set off alarms when the traffic is heavy. Before the bombing halt they collected information on enemy installations, and called in strikes. Their studies and observations led them to carry out the sabotage of the railway bridge at Lao Cai across from Hokow on the border between North Vietnam and China. Three years ago, the Berets asked for control of the SOG operation. General Westmoreland refused and the Berets set up their own cross-border operation under the organizational cognomen of B-57. It is to this highly classified group that most of the Berets who had been charged by the Army for the murder of Chuyen belonged.

Under Army control, the Special



Colonel Rheault—push-ups in the sun, secrets in the night.

Forces operates in all corps of the Vietnam command from its centrally located base at Nhatrang. Wedged between a picture postcard rice paddy on one side and a supporting air base on the other, it is hemmed in by formidable mountains that burst out of the landscape five miles away, and the South China Sea, ten minutes away by jarring jeep ride. Headquarters has that semi-permanent air of a wartime base camp, with the grass plots, the trim fences, and the walkways tended by Vietnamese peasants in their cone-shaped straw hats.

The new visitor to this base finds it arresting to come upon dozens of signs lettered with political exhortation lifted from speeches of famous personages from Marx to Churchill that serve to define America's confrontation with Communism. They say:

We in this country in this generation are by destiny rather than choice, the watchmen on the walls of world freedom.

—JOHN F. KENNEDY

We did not choose to be a guardian at this gate but there is no one else.

—LYNDON B. JOHNSON

The theory of Communism may be summed up in one sentence: abolish all private property.

—KARL MARX AND FRIEDRICH ENGELS

Among the benefits of the Special Forces soldier, these instant political lessons aside, is a resident masseur who also runs a steam bath, a Dairy

Queen stand that dispenses banana splits, a small gym, and a handball court. Both the officers' club and the noncommissioned officers' club (there are very few unranked Berets) are dim-lit dens adorned with Oriental nudes painted on velvet, and staffed by local barmaids who are given lie detector tests every month to assure their loyalty. Hard liquor served in air-conditioned comfort costs a quarter.

If it is difficult to summon thoughts of war amid these comparative luxuries, one has only to wait, as I did on a recent visit, for night to descend. Soon the soft, almost muted pop of mortars begins, a shell exploding in a flare that descends on its own parachute, lighting the paddy. One false move down there and the next shell showers steel. Up on the mountains, where the Special Forces maintains outposts, the helicopter gun ships have been called in and they work over the crags for hours. As we drive through the intricate system of locked gates, airplane motors roar in the night and a party of irregulars in tiger combat suits, with helmets and rifles, sits in the Asian squat waiting to be flown off toward the Cambodian border 100 miles to the west.

The basic mission of the Special Forces, it still insists, is advisory. "We are here to work ourselves out of a job," says its present commander, Col. Michael Healy. It advises the Vietnamese Special Forces (black berets and tiger suits), which also has its headquarters in Nhatrang, but most significantly perhaps, in pursuit of its basic tactic of counter-insurgency, the Green Berets have organized a private army of minority ethnic groups. Known as CIDG (for Civilian Irregular Defense Group), this force is made of Montagnards, Cambodians living in Vietnam, and Nungs, largely Vietnamese of Chinese ancestry). The CIDGs are paid and supplied by the United States. There are now more than sixty CIDG camps dotted all over the remote and contested regions of South Vietnam. Beefed up with a Vietnamese Special Forces detachment, a Green Beret advisory group, and camp strike force companies, the camps engage the Cong, chop away at the supply routes from the north, gather intelligence, and by their presence hopefully build hinterland support and confidence in the Saigon government.

A typical camp looks not unlike a frontier stockade. A tall watchtower rises in the center, and blockhouses are set into the walls of the fortification. The camp commander is the commander of the Vietnamese Special Forces detachment. The U.S. Special Forces supplies the stiffener—an

The Black Arts in a Free Society

The case of the Green Berets raises profoundly disturbing questions for the American people. These questions will not be put to rest by the decision to drop the murder charges that brought into the open, if only partially and fleetingly, facts about the undercover world of espionage and counter-espionage.

Espionage has always been a grisly but well-known fact of international life. What was not generally known, however, was the extent to which the United States has gone beyond espionage into political assassination. Indeed, not the least disturbing aspect of the Green Berets episode was the startling attitude of certain government or military spokesmen who asserted that they couldn't understand the reason for all the public clamor over the case of Thai Khac Chuyen. It was made to appear that people had become unduly excited over the murder of a relatively low-level figure, and that this sort of thing had been going on routinely for a long time. It was further brought out that the United States was involved, directly or indirectly, in the assassination of such diverse political figures as Che Guevara in Bolivia and President Ngo Dinh Diem in South Vietnam.

Appropriate emphasis has been given to the point that the overthrow of political leaders or the liquidation of agents was not the sole or even the primary function of our secret operations. As Horace Sutton points out in the accompanying article, the Green Berets attempted to strengthen South Vietnam against the Vietcong on the community level by making local leadership more responsive to the pressing need for social justice, health, and education.

Full credit, of course, must be given to the work of the Green Berets and other agencies in helping to upgrade the economic and social conditions of the South Vietnamese, but it is absurd to suppose that we are dealing here with a balance sheet on which there are good works on one side and murder on the other. Murder, whatever the surrounding supposed amenities or

auspices, is still murder. And the most relevant comment in the present episode was made by Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, who said that even in warfare men are obligated to hold to a certain moral code.

It was this latter attitude, of course, that properly served as the basis for the Nuremberg Trials, in which the United States took the initiative in contending that the fact of war does not obliterate all moral standards and that men must be made accountable for certain crimes even though they are acting under wartime orders. The governing principle then advanced by the United States was that individuals, not nations, make war and that, therefore, individuals must be held responsible. If the United States was right at Nuremberg, where does this leave the United States now? Where does it leave the men who have acted for the United States in Vietnam—not only in the Chuyen case but in the war itself, which is being carried out completely outside the provisions of the United States Constitution that seek to protect the American people against war by executive order?

The question, we repeat, is not whether it is possible to fight a hot or cold war without spying, but whether the American people understand just how far some of their secret operatives have gone in undermining our own government in the very act of undermining others. When it is said that we have no choice in the modern world but to play the full international game, it means that we think we are capable of producing a special breed of men whom we can trust to live beyond the law, a hypothesis completely at odds with the basic principles of American government. How did the hypothesis work out in Laos a decade ago, when we helped in the coup d'état against President Souvanna Phouma? The coup was a fiasco—not just because it violated the principle of self-determination that we proclaimed to be at the heart of our foreign policy, but because it revealed the stark incompetence of our intelligence operations. The result of the intervention in Laos was

a civil war in which the United States was paymaster for both armies. The result, too, was that the Pathet Lao became a powerful force and was able to develop greater support from the Laotians in a few months than had been achieved over a period of years. Eventually, the United States recognized it had made an error and restored its support to Souvanna, but Laos is still badly split and the full price of that error has yet to be paid.

The trouble with the argument that we have no choice but to imitate the enemy in some respects is that we can become too successful. "We have met the enemy and they are we," is one of history's most poignant complaints. "I thought they were saving us from the Vietcong," cried the widow of Thai Khac Chuyen, "but I see now that they are just as bad as the Vietcong."

Over many years, we have heard our leaders say that the ultimate battle in the world is for the minds of men. We do not win such battles by total disregard of men's capacity for making moral judgments.

The most devastating argument against government officials who contend that political assassination and subversion are essential to our own security is that they have so little ability to anticipate the effects of their actions. Our secret agents, we are now told, were involved in the assassination of Che Guevara. Doubtless, the agents congratulated themselves on having got rid of an up-and-coming Castro. But what they actually did was to give millions of youth in the United States a new hero, albeit a dead one, and to help create costly and perhaps volatile disillusion with the preachments of a free society about moral approaches to change. In the act of suppressing a foreign revolutionary, they are helping to feed a revolution at home. True, some people are less appalled by the assassination of Ngo Dinh Diem than they are by Guevara's, and vice-versa. Either way, the action is reprehensible.

The inevitable consequence of all these activities is that the government of the United States is cutting deeply into its own history and its position in the world, and therefore into its security. The fact that this is not even understood by those who have been chosen to serve the American people is the most perilous fact of all.

—N.C.
(Norman Cousins)

"A" team made up of fourteen Green Berets led by a captain. The Americans specialize in heavy and light weapons, demolition, radio communications, intelligence, civic action, and psychological operations. A highly trained medical team capable of performing minor surgery accompanies the group.

Should a camp run into deep trouble, it can be immediately supported by a Mobile Strike Force or "Mike Force" deployed in minutes from each of the four corps zones in Vietnam, and also from the Green Beret headquarters at Nhatrang.

Begun in 1961, the CIDG program calls for training indigenous personnel in isolated areas and ultimately turning back the control of the camp to the irregulars. It was first mounted to help the government troops organize the minorities and to keep them from being recruited by the Vietcong. When the Vietnamese Special Forces can run the camp without American help, Special Forces pulls out, though it continues to send in supplies and lend tactical aid if necessary. When the irregulars can run their own camp and the surrounding area has been pacified, all Special Forces, both American and Vietnamese, pull out and the irregulars, at this point given the title of Regional Forces, take over their own defense and support. Since 1962, six camps have been transferred to the Vietnamese Special Forces and sixteen converted to Regional Forces.

Today the CIDG force has grown to 40,000 troops, but it is this alleged control of a so-called private army on foreign soil as well as a highly independent method of warfare that has nettled the conventional warfare generals.

"Face it," says Master Sergeant Edwin Clements of Midwest City, Oklahoma, "we have a different mission and we operate differently from an infantry battalion. Old-line officers don't understand our kind of warfare. Like in any society the old folks don't like to change; the young ones do. A lot of West Pointers want to stay away from these outfits and go with conventional units which generals who award promotions can understand."

SFC Lonnie Johnson, a thirty-five-year-old black soldier from Flint, Michigan, who has spent nine years in the Special Forces, four of them in Vietnam, admits "there is a lot we don't tell our families." Still he winces when his wife asks if it is true that the Green Berets are really a bunch of killers. "We're supposed to be elite," he says, "but I've been with MAC-V people who just didn't like us." Yet Johnson's job is far from skulldug-

gery. He speaks Vietnamese. He trains Vietnamese, and ethnic minorities as well, in political and psychological operations. "We build schools and have the children out with the flag and tell them this support comes from the Saigon government." In working with indigenous forces he has run into trouble from the U.S. Air Force, which uses Nungs as guards and has outbid the Special Forces for their services.

The new brand of warfare attracts young intellectuals such as Jean François Romey, an ROTC graduate from Berkeley. Now twenty-six, Romey is half French and lived in France until he was fifteen. A captain in Special Forces, he has grown a stylish mustache that is twirled on the ends and wears a pair of Montagnard bracelets given him by indigenous troops with whom he served. Romey's specialties are motivation, indoctrination, civic action, and psychological operations. Like the psychological warfare efforts in World War II, the so-called "psy-ops," as they are known in Vietnam war lingo, call for aerial broadcasts and leaflet dissemination, both of which exploit the enemy's weaknesses. "We counter the Communist approach using similar methods, with two exceptions," Romey says. "They use deceit, and we tell the truth. They use selective terror, and we do not. The greatest implement we have is to play it straight. We tell the enemy we know he has malaria. We tell him we know that letters written home a year ago haven't been mailed yet. The defectors are very scared; they think they are going to get skinned alive. We treat them with kindness, give them medical care, and they become faithful. Some former VCs have even become Kit Carson Scouts working as the point element for conventional troops."

Romey classifies civic action as "nation-building." Says he, "It is self-help. Take Die Hard Bridge. It was built by Americans and destroyed by VCs. The Americans built it again and once more it was destroyed. Then we gave the materiel to local people. They built it and it was never again destroyed. We give basic elementary lessons in free enterprise. We give a Montagnard a piece of land to farm. He may plant half of it, because that is all he needs. Then we say to him, 'If you plant all of it, you will have a little extra and you can sell that in the market. Perhaps you can sell it for a little less than your competitor and you will have money to buy something you want.'

"These people have been operating on the mandarin system in which the superior is king. Take the waitresses



Capt. Jean François Romey—"they use deceit, we tell the truth."

in the mess hall. At first they were bowing, and we said, 'Please bring me some coffee,' or 'Do me a favor and bring me some salad.' Soon they began to talk back and some older officers said, 'Goddam it, in the French days there was no back talk.' But what we must realize is that it is better that they talk back because it shows they are beginning to be people."

Major Phan Ba Ky, the motivation and indoctrination officer for the Vietnamese Special Forces, was sent to Fort Bragg for training. While there he was taken out for dinner. At the end of the meal an elaborate chocolate cake was brought out. Major Ky knew he should not eat it, but to please his hosts he accepted a piece and was sick all night. "I think of that cake," he says now, "as the cake of democracy. We must eat it slowly. It is too rich for us."

Such lofty purposes as nation-building and elementary lessons in democracy and free enterprise are the cleaner aspects of Special Forces. It is, of course, also in the business of intelligence collection. It makes drops along the Cambodian border at night to watch, and sometimes to attack, enemy vehicular traffic. It dispatches Recondo teams—two or three Green Berets and three or four Vietnamese Special Forces troopers—who live for a week in the jungle to determine if and where the enemy is massing. It trains its irregulars to follow the movements of enemy columns and sometimes to capture couriers. Its highly classified B-57 operation at Nhatrang retains a company of Nungs—sometimes called American Gurkhas—to perform its specialized activities. One of its specialties is the HALO op-

eration, an acronym for a high-altitude, low-level jump in which agents drop from high altitudes and open their chutes at the last moment, thus avoiding radar detection. At least one, perhaps more, of these operations met with utter disaster. "It was like Charlie jumping into Longbinh," said one bitter officer. Charlie (for Victor Charlie) is the Vietcong and Longbinh is a vast U.S. Army complex twelve miles from Saigon.

Because these operations were compromised, a leak was suspected, and when a sweep of a Cong command post turned up a photograph in which a figure identified as Chuyen was seen talking to enemy troops, the Berets called in their agent and confronted him with the evidence. He worked for Special Forces as an agent along the Cambodian border. The photograph showed up in a highly suspicious setting. There had been a serious defection and the Beret's entire net stood to be exposed. It is said that Chuyen never confessed, but given sodium pentathol and polygraph lie detector tests, he "blipped," which is to say registered deceit at every critical mention.

The rule book says a "contaminated" agent must be isolated—jailed, sent to another country, stashed away in a safe haven, or somehow put on ice. To turn him over to the Vietnamese might have proved embarrassing. It is a fundamental tenet in the murky art of intelligence that while you cooperate with your allies and exchange intelligence, you don't let

him know your system. While he may suspect you are involved in exercises that might be contrary to his national policy—such as working inside Cambodia and Laos—you don't give him the details and require him to object.

At this point the Green Berets turned to the CIA for advice and, if possible, for disposition. It was not an unnatural move since the CIA is indeed the central intelligence agency, the major clearinghouse for information. It maintains vast files, has resources and contingencies for such occasions. There began a long series of exchanges between Special Forces headquarters, the CIA station chief at Nhatrang, and the CIA headquarters for Vietnam in the U.S. Embassy in Saigon.

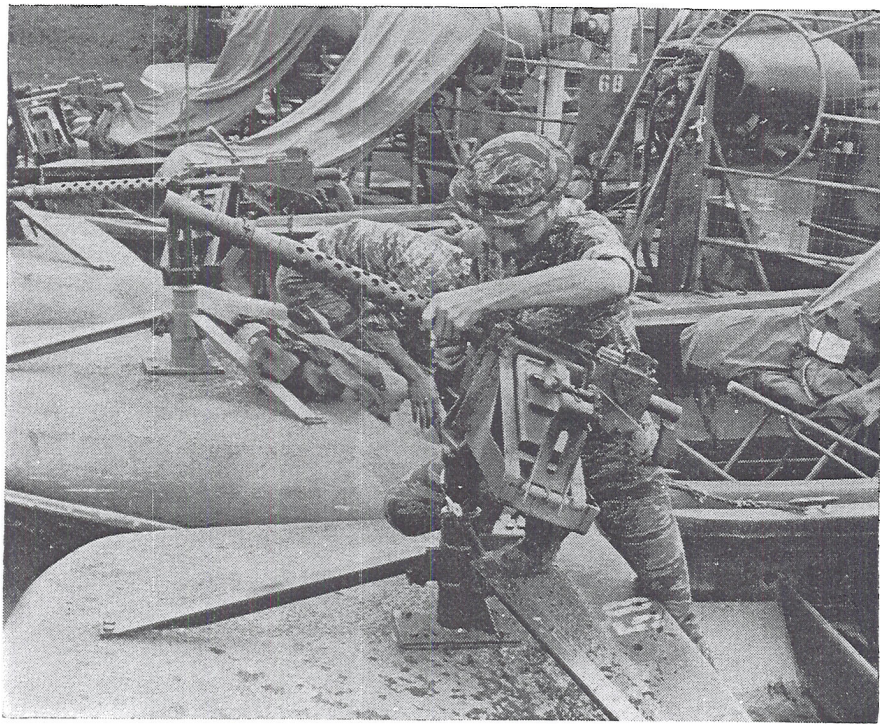
According to one participant privy to the exchanges, the CIA adopted the attitude of a respectable business enterprise willing to indulge in, say, a little price-fixing as long as it is done on a lower level. In effect, says this observer, they were saying, "Of course, officially we don't condone this sort of thing, but it would seem as if you have no choice." By the time definitive word finally came down from the CIA not to kill Chuyen, the Special Forces, fearful of further leaks, further botched missions, more lives placed in jeopardy, and new defections, had already dispatched Chuyen to the bottom of Nhatrang Bay.

The CIA decided it must inform the U.S. commander in Vietnam, Gen. Creighton Abrams, a hard-line soldier who had graduated from West Point

in 1936, became a second lieutenant of cavalry, saw his first action two years later with the Fourth Armored Division during World War II. Abrams sent for Special Forces Commander Col. Robert Rheault, a product of Exeter, a tall and lean aristocrat who had been appointed to the Military Academy by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, graduating in 1946. The holder of a masters degree in international affairs, which he took at George Washington University, a skilled skier, a dedicated physical fitness practitioner, fluent in French, Rheault had won two Legion of Merits and five air medals on a previous tour of duty with the Special Forces in Vietnam. He had served in Okinawa, and once commanded the Special Action Force-Asia, a CIA-directed group mounting covert operations in Laos, along the edges of Burma and the Yunnan Province of China, which borders Burma, Laos, and North Vietnam. When he came to Vietnam at May's end, a scant month before the ill-fated mission in Nhatrang Bay, he came as a golden boy, a picture-book officer, a friend of Westmoreland's, an officer privy to as many secret U.S. operations in Southeast Asia as any man alive.

Facing Abrams, who had the CIA report that July morning, Colonel Rheault opted to stick to the cover story woven by his staff officers. Chuyen had been sent, he said, on a dangerous mission along the Cambodian border and he had not come back.

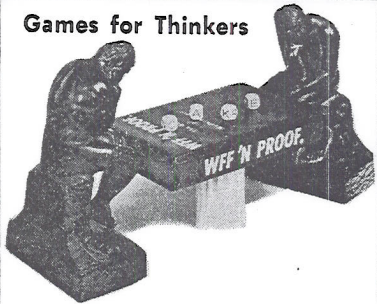
Some days later, SFC Alvin L. Smith, Jr., of Naples, Florida, either filled with remorse or panic born of the incident, burst into the office of the CIA Station Chief at Nhatrang, spilled the whole story, and asked for protection. Once more the station chief contacted Saigon and soon Abrams had the whole story. He exploded. No one lies to the commanding officer. Murder in any form is not permissible in the U.S. Army. He ordered an immediate investigation, and the Army's Criminal Investigation Division went to work. Agents grilled the Berets. The harbor was dragged by special naval ships. Frogmen and divers searched for a body. None was found. The officers, except for Rheault, who was incarcerated in a trailer, were plunged into solitary confinement. "Clean 'em out," Abrams had ordered, and they were well cleaned, including Rheault's staff intelligence officer, the head of the super-secret B-57 detachment, and the Colonel himself. Maj. Gen. George Lafayette Mabry, Jr., commanding officer of the U.S. Support Command under Abrams, charged them with premeditated murder and conspiracy to murder and
(Continued on page 68)



Irregular soldier in the Delta—"a so-called private army . . . a highly independent method of warfare. . ."

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Green Berets

Continued from page 28

unleashed an investigation—the Army stated it was not unakin to a grand jury investigation—into the charges.

On the very same day, August 6th, either by coincidence or purpose, President Thieu, in the course of a general shift in staff officers, replaced Gen. Doan Van Quang, head of the Vietnamese Special Forces, and an old friend of Rheault's, with Brig. Gen. Lam Son. It was recalled that in Diem's day Lam Son once slapped the face of an American adviser and had to be shipped to the Philippines.

Now the rumors flew in Saigon. Although some theorists still insist that Thai Khac Chuyen was a triple agent, and some even that he was a peace emissary from Hanoi, there is at hand little evidence for such assumptions. Chuyen worked at three camps, all jump-off points for cross-border forays. If Hanoi were contacting the United States, there would seem to be other avenues much more available—across the table in Paris for example. If he had been Thieu's personal agent sniffing out the Green Beret operation, why would Thieu have admitted it by inquiring indignantly of Chuyen's whereabouts as one story insisted he did?

The South Vietnamese government officially disclaimed interest in the case, and in Saigon an interesting commentary on Vietnamese thinking appeared in an editorial in an English-language Vietnamese newspaper. Drawing a parallel between the victims of a civilian plane crash and the victims of war it said:

When a man dies in battle or is executed for an ideal by his enemies, we

feel this is the proper order of things ordained by a superior being. The very fact that the victim finds himself in the fatal circumstances results from his implicit dedication of his life to an ideal. This to us is the natural course of events.

On the American side, however, the old accusations were dusted off, to be hurled again. Was not Special Forces similar to the Waffen SS, the elite Hitlerian troops that fought with the Wehrmacht? Were they not, with their special uniforms and training and privileges, an incarnation of the Praetorian Guard of old Rome? Even a sophisticated American correspondent in Saigon, perhaps not given to such excesses himself, wondered if it were not strange that Rheault was so dedicated to his physical condition. What manner of man might he really be? Supposedly, during his time in Okinawa he ran two miles on the beach during his lunch hour and ordered everyone over forty to take a physical training test once a month instead of every six months as the rules prescribe. In Vietnam he did push-ups on his patio at high noon, all indications of a special breed.

It was recalled that the second in command at CIA headquarters in Washington was Lt. Gen. Robert E. Cushman, Jr. a marine who commanded the First Corps at Danang during the siege of Khesanh. Cushman and Abrams were in less than perfect harmony over the employment of troops at Khesanh. And there were still scores to settle between Cushman and Special Forces, whose camp at Long-vei, outside Khesanh, had been overrun.

A CIA man connected with the case wondered aloud about the curious interest of his own headquarters in



A camp transfer in Vietnam—"when the irregulars can run their own camp, Americans and Vietnamese pull out."

the demise of one double agent in view of the numbers alleged to have been killed under the auspices of his agency in Laos. Some of the people who were involved in Laos were in positions of CIA command in Saigon. On the other hand, a ranking spokesman for the agency told me in Saigon that "terminate with extreme prejudice"—the phrase the CIA was supposed to have sent back to Special Forces to indicate its recommendation in the Chuyen case—"is not a term we use." The CIA may terminate an agent every week, but that means terminate his employment, not his life. Hired by a man who uses an alias, a CIA-employed agent never knows his employer's true identity, and is given only the EEI—essential elements of information.

The CIA, as the agency is pleased to point out, occupies itself with high-level matters, such as the recent Trong case in which Thieu's trusted political adviser, an aide with a position roughly corresponding to Henry Kissinger's role with Nixon, was found to be part of a net stretching clear to Hanoi. The Green Berets, by CIA definition, work only on low-level matters. In the Chuyen case they came looking for advice. In the pre-trial investigation that followed the arrest of the Green Berets, the CIA station chief at Nhatrang was on the stand for two-and-a-half hours. Much of that time he demurred, pleading executive immunity.

Ten days before charges against the Berets were dismissed by the Army, the CIA in Saigon made it clear that CIA witnesses would plead executive immunity if a court-martial were to be held. It was also made clear by Henry Rothblatt, the celebrated criminal lawyer who had been engaged to represent three of the Berets, that it was not possible to show just "a little bit" of evidence. "The Supreme Court insists on all the evidence," he said. Moreover, without a corpse it would then be necessary to have proof that the body was destroyed. A confession is the weakest form of evidence, and a confession without a corpse is not enough. A witness without a corpse might be enough, but in this case the witnesses were also defendants. Moreover, there was the matter of command influence in which Abrams orders the arrest, the investigation, and the trial and appoints the officers to hear the case that he eventually reviews.

Some Washington sources have said that it was not a threatened miscarriage of justice that caused President Nixon to intercede, but rather the influence upon the President of Representative L. Mendel Rivers, chairman of the House Armed Services Commit-

PLAYBOY, COMING UP

NOVEMBER ISSUES

"Reader, suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of Congress. But I repeat myself."

Neither the late Drew Pearson nor U.S. Representative Richard C. Bolling is quite as withering as Mark Twain was about the intelligence of our national lawmakers, but both demonstrate, in their tandem articles in November's PLAYBOY, that the art of criticizing Congress remains a lively one. Pearson's *The Senate*—an appropriate parting shot after more than 40 years of spinning riders on his Washington Merry-Go-Round—excoriates what he calls "the stench of putrefying ethics that hangs over the Capitol today." *The House*, by the respected Missouri Democrat—a veteran of 21 years in the lower chamber—authoritatively indicts an archaic and often corrupt committee system that caters to special-interest groups at the expense of the electorate. Both men propose radical (yet practical) reforms designed to give all the people a fairer shake in the halls of power.

* * *

"There is now no Anglo-Saxon writer alive," Sybille Bedford wrote in her review of *The Comedians*, "who can tell a story better than Mr. Graham Greene"—a proposition we think you'll agree is confirmed by a delightfully contrasting companion to Greene's currently best-selling *Collected Essays*. It's a novel called *Crook's Tour*, and you'll find the first installment in PLAYBOY's November issue. A meek British bank clerk in early retirement, his thoroughly surprising aunt and her African manservant are the principal characters in a rollicking *Our-Man-in-Havana*-like tale permeated with—and every bit as heady as—*cannabis*. The emphasis this time is on humor, but the familiar Greene sense of urbane malignity is delightfully in evidence, too: It's as if Dostoevski had edited a P. G. Wodehouse story.

* * *

"He is a big man with an imperial manner. The head is leonine and the facial expression at once fierce and sullen. He was dressed, like a Mod black emperor, in a brilliantly colored dashiki, bell-bottom jeans and high-top country shoes . . . For over an hour, he delivered a passionate sermon that described the black man's plight in white society. It was filled with street talk, down-home slang and quotations from The Bible—but its effect was Greek tragedy with soul."

Thus runs part of the introduction to November's *Playboy Interview* with the Reverend Jesse Jackson, the 27-year-old economic director of Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference and head of Chicago's Operation Breadbasket. Like our January 1965 conversation with Dr. King, whose pre-eminent place in the civil rights movement Jackson seems likely to inherit, the interview itself probes behind his "country preacher" oratory to the tough-minded political savvy—and the passionate humanity—of a powerful new black leader.

* * *

Alternatives to Analysis, by Ernest Havemann, a survey of the off-beat new regimens employed by post-Freudian therapists, and *Head Stone*, a cliché-free look at rock-'n'-Rolling Stone Mick Jagger by *Punch's* Deputy Editor Alan Coren, are two other disparate elements in the November PLAYBOY mix—but that's enough for one short column. Enough, that is, to assure old friends that the new issue lives up to PLAYBOY's catholic and literate standards—and enough, we hope, to make a few new friends as well. Like yourself?

Cordially,

THE EDITORS OF PLAYBOY®



P.S.: We also publish pictures of pretty girls.

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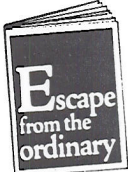


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tee. Rivers, who was against a trial, has championed the White House stand on the ABM. When the released Berets returned to the U.S., they seemed, on the face of it, to deny the killing. In fact, they were denying a murder had been committed, saying in effect that in a war you can't "murder" the enemy. Rheault said, on returning to the United States, "There is no conclusive evidence that the individual was ever killed." The body, of course, was never recovered, thus no evidence exists.

Abrams's views about the Green Berets were made plain when he replaced Colonel Rheault with Col. Alexander Lemberes, who had won a record as a troubleshooter, but who was, in derisive Green Beret terminology, a "leg," which is to say, a soldier who has not qualified for airborne duty. Colonel Lemberes tried to rectify that by making five qualified jumps in one hour, but unfortunately broke his ankle on the fourth try.

For the second time in six weeks the Special Forces got a new commander when Lemberes was replaced with Col. Michael Healy, who had entered the Army as an enlisted man in 1945 and won his commission as a ninety-day wonder at Fort Benning. Called "Blind Mike" for the thick glasses he wears, Colonel Healy seems more like the friendly parish priest than a fighting soldier. Yet, he joined the Airborne Rangers in Korea in search of action, joined Special Forces in 1953 soon after it was formed, later commanded an airborne battalion in Vietnam. "Charge it all up to Irish inquisitiveness," he says.

Before his troops, Colonel Healy's rhetoric flows in old Knute Rockne, let's-win-this-one-for-the-Gipper style. In remembering the Special Forces dead, he says in ringing, quivering tones: "They set the standard. They made it what it is. Don't let 'em down." He addresses his command as "the most outstanding officers in the U.S. Army." The mood in the privacy of his office, however, is strictly downplay. "We're not a separate little army at all," he says, "we're part of the Army team. The Special Forces are special because they are volunteers, because they went to Ranger School, because they are airborne, trained in weapons and demolitions. We have bright, alert officers and we give them missions and they are special. But they are no better than any other good American soldier. My mission is a military mission. It has nothing to do with a lot of high-blown cloak-and-dagger stuff." Asked about B-57 operations, the Colonel clams up. "That's classified," he snaps.

The essence of deep-dyed Green Beret fundamental strategy, according to one field grade officer who has since left Special Forces and the Army, is to borrow from the successful Communist method of guerrilla warfare. Green Berets echelons cross-fertilized with the insurgents would, he thinks, form an effective force in fomenting people's wars of our own. Since we cannot use thermonuclear war, the United States has to resort to some form of guerrilla warfare to combat the encroachments of Communism. It is this confrontation between such forms of revolutionary warfare and the old system of strategy and tactics as employed by the Army, Navy and the State Department that is causing conflict in the forces, according to this theorist.

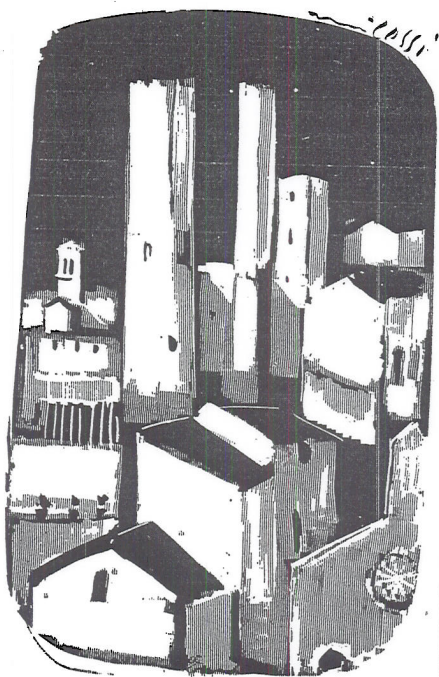
Guerrilla tactics are not new to America. They began in the French and Indian wars when Rogers' Rangers were formed from the New Hampshire militia to conduct unconventional warfare against the Indians. The Confederacy spawned Mosby's Guerrillas, who harried federal troops and once made off with a Union general without losing a man of their own. Merrill's Marauders performed effectively in Burma during World War II, not to mention Darby's Rangers, a free-wheeling force that trained in Northern Ireland, fought in Tunis, Sicily, and Italy. There is even a precedent for assassination that goes back to the American Revolution. Tories, according to North Callahan's book *The Royal Raiders*, who were captured by rebellious Americans were not given the status of prisoners of war, but were "tried as rebels, then executed in cold blood."

Despite its partisan adherents and despite its successes, guerrilla warfare by Americans has not always been successful, particularly in Vietnam. The Green Berets were caught by two Montagnard uprisings, one in September 1964 in which twenty-nine Vietnamese troops were reported killed, and another in December 1965. During their war in Vietnam the French organized an elite guerrilla force known as GOMA for Groupement de Commandos Mixtes Aeroportes. They mixed bands of 400 tribesmen with French noncommissioned officers, who sometimes married native girls to try to assure the loyalty of their tribe. Working along the China border, they had a telling effect on General Giap's forces, but the loyalty of these insurgents was ever in doubt, and in the end they were unable to cut Giap's long supply line to Dienbienphu.

Fighting counter-insurgency warfare with the attendant murky skills of black warfare, the Special Forces

often seems more of a political instrument than an arm of the military. Asked to perform arch deeds but subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice, it remains in a position that is unprotected except for public opinion and, as in this case, executive intervention. It may now be the time, some Berets think, for the Forces to become a separate branch, perhaps under the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Whether this would make it an elite guard too similar to strongarm troops once in favor in Fascist countries is a question for a democracy to ponder.

Only a few days before it dropped its case, the Army convened the correspondents on the base at Longbinh for a long and wordy explanation of military justice. It droned on interminably while a judge advocate savored every golden word, and I elected, after an hour, to leave. Turning up a roadway called MacArthur Loop, I came by chance on a low green building where the Beret officers were interned. There was Colonel Rheault, stripped down to shorts, nose smeared with suntan cream, doing push-ups in the sun. "How is it going?" I shouted to him over the dry moat that separated us. He gave me a thumbs-up. "We shall overcome," he shouted back. I hitched a ride back to Saigon and walked through the dingy arcade on the way to my hotel. The fruit peddlers in their conical hats had already drawn up their baskets and bicycles in front of the Eden Theater, and awaited the customers for the afternoon show. I looked up at the garish posters. The Eden was playing *One Spy Too Many*.



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