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Berets in Vietnam Still Resentful and Suspicious

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NHATRANG, South Vietnam, Nov. 6—"I personally side with Eichmann," said M. Sgt. Edwin L. Clements at the Special Forces operations base outside this coastal town.

The sergeant referred not to Eichmann's actions but to the defense—obedience to lawful orders—that he employed vainly at his trial in Israel as a Nazi war criminal.

Sergeant Clement's comment reflected a feeling that seems universal here—continuing resentment and suspicion over the Army's treatment of eight soldiers in the murder case that led last week to the resignation of Col. Robert B. Rheault, for commander of all Special Forces, or Green Berets, in Vietnam.

Many Share Critical View

According to Sergeant Clements, a hard-bitten drawling noncom from Midwest City, Okla., Eichmann's role in mass execution of Jews was "inhuman and ruthless—but he had his orders."

In two days of informal conversations at this fortified headquarters with many officers and enlisted men, it appeared that Sergeant Clements's resentment was shared by all.

Colonel Rheault, together with six other officers and a sergeant, was jailed on charges of murder and conspiracy in the death of a Vietnamese, evidently a double agent. The charges were dropped by the Army in September when the Government refused to allow officials of the Central Intelligence Agency to testify.

The feeling here is that the facts in the case—although every one insists that they are known only by a very few for security reasons—were proba-

bly as the Army alleges them to be but that the killing was not murder but a justified act of war. "Distasteful jobs" are sometimes a soldier's lot, said a sergeant who asked not to be identified.

The feeling is widespread that the Army hypocritically turned against the men actually involved in the death, which they think was ordered by the C.I.A., and charged them with murder, and that Colonel Rheault then said that actions taken by his men were his responsibility and challenged the Army to charge him with them.

Whether this is true, the feeling attests the admiration held for the former commander here.

"Right close to 100 per cent of the men are behind Colonel Rheault," Sergeant Clements said.

Most of those questioned believed that the Army was motivated by resentment of the "elite status" of the Green Berets. The animosity of the Special Forces men questioned focuses on Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, commander of American forces in Vietnam.

Charge Breach of Faith

General Abrams is suspected by many of the officers and men of trying to "get" the Green Berets. They are bitter over the cover of the current issue of their monthly magazine, The Green Beret, which shows General Abrams pinning a Presidential unit citation to the standard of the Special Forces group in Vietnam.

The Green Berets consider it ironic and a breach of faith with Colonel Rheault that this should have appeared at the same time that the colonel prematurely ended his distinguished military career.

The men questioned believe that Colonel Rheault had no

choice but to resign from the Army and that all the officers in the case would eventually do so.

"It's like working for a company," a lieutenant said. "If the boss tries to put you in jail there is no use staying even if you're let out. You know you'll never make vice president of that outfit."

The consensus, or at least hope, is that neither the prestige nor the morale of the Special Forces will turn out to have been badly hurt, but many officers concede that when the case first came to public attention in August they feared for the future of their branch.

Still, the view is often expressed that some of the glamour and feeling of specialness have worn off. This is particularly widespread among Negro enlisted men, who make up perhaps one quarter of the 5,000 Green Berets in Vietnam.

A sergeant with more than 10 years in the Special Forces said he still felt himself to be part of the elite but less elite than before. Stating sentiments also expressed by other black soldiers, he said that a feeling of being discriminated against by race, together with the case of Colonel Rheault, had produced a decline in the morale of Negroes here.