

Ex-Green Beret Still Puzzled by Case

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By JOSEPH B. TREASTER

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BLOOMFIELD, N. J.—“Anything we did in Vietnam we felt was necessary, justified and approved,” said former Army Capt. Robert F. Marasco.

The tall, dark-haired man who was a key figure in the Green Beret spy case, was relaxing at his parents' home, where he is gradually recovering from critical injuries received in a traffic accident last October.

Speaking softly, a trace of bewilderment in his voice, Mr. Marasco said that he and the seven others who had been accused of murdering a Vietnamese double agent last summer still wondered why they had been arrested.

“We didn't understand it then and we don't think we ever will,” he said, spreading his hands wide in a questioning gesture.

“We had charges read to us and that sort of thing. But the ‘why,’ as to why the military was prosecuting us,” Mr. Marasco went on, “aside from the standard answers—you stole a box of C-rations, therefore you must be punished—there was nothing.”

Charges Abruptly Dropped

In late September the charges were abruptly dropped because, according to Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor, the Central Intelligence Agency would not permit its agents to testify in court.

The eight Green Beret soldiers were returned to the United States and in October Col. Robert Rheault, the commander of the Special Forces in Vietnam, and Mr. Marasco resigned their commissions.

“I decided that it wasn't the kind of organization I wanted to devote my life to,” the 27-year-old Mr. Marasco said. “I felt I couldn't work for any kind of organization, military or civilians, that did not stand behind its people.”

“I'm not anti-Army or anti-military,” he added. “It was just a very unfortunate situation and a few people involved in the situation are not on the top of good-guy list.”

In fact, leaving the Army was for Mr. Marasco a rather painful experience. He had found military intelligence challenging and he was considered quite good at it.

Feels Cool to Sales Work

Before enlisting and going through officers' candidate school, Mr. Marasco had been a million-dollar-a-year life insurance salesman. Now, however, he feels that somewhere the drive and desire needed for selling are gone from him.

And although his former employer has talked with him about a supervisory or managerial job, he is not overly enthusiastic about that either. He has thought about working for the C.I.A. but, in light of his recent experience, that seems an unlikely possibility.

Mr. Marasco was disappointed that, instead of clearly absolving the Green Berets of murder allegations, Mr. Resor said in his statement when the case was dropped that the “acts charged, but not proved, represent a fundamental violation of Army regulations, orders and principles.”

Despite the lack of official exoneration, Mr. Marasco said he believed that a large segment of the American public was in sympathy with him and the other Green Berets.

While they were in detention in Longbinh, he and the others got thousands of cards and letters.

In San Francisco, on the way home, they got a surprisingly warm welcome from a group of hippies.

And when he was hospital-

ized, Mr. Marasco continued to receive mail from all over the country from people, he said, “who had followed the case and were apparently upset, felt we had got a bad deal.”

Pinned to one of several sprays of flowers he received was a note that read, “To heroic American from a grateful American.”

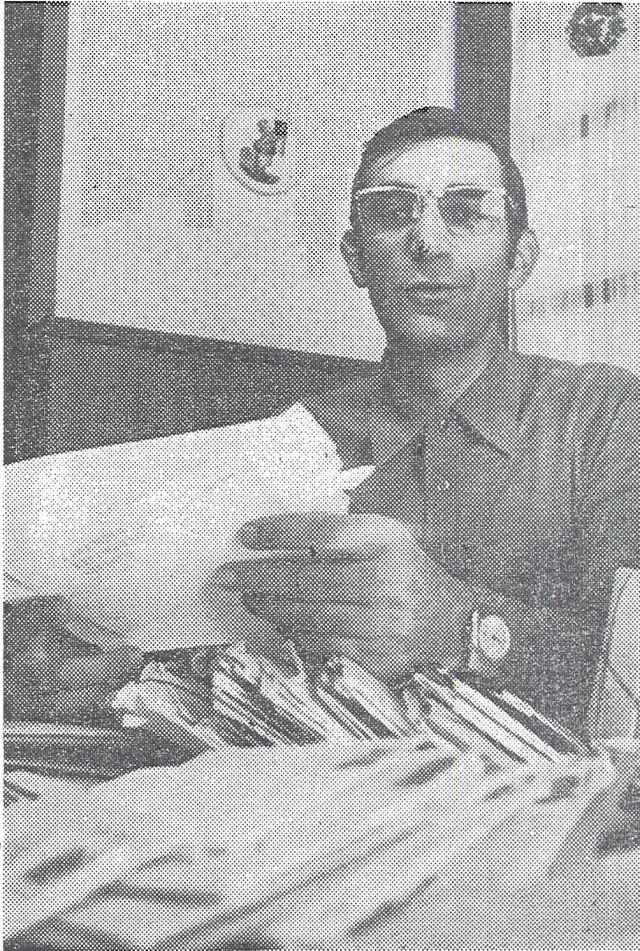
The mail and the gifts “really made me feel great,” Mr. Marasco said lighting a cigarette. “I thought, ‘Maybe everything was worthwhile after all.’”

In its formal charges, the Army singled out Mr. Marasco as the man who fired the pistol that allegedly killed the agent, identified as Thai Khac Chuyen. Was he really “the triggerman?”

Sitting in a white leather armchair, Mr. Marasco smiled as he saw the question taking shape. “It's ridiculous,” he replied, as he has consistently done in the past.

Asked for elaboration, Mr. Marasco said:

“I think that covers just about everything. The statement in itself covers so many things. It's clear enough.”



The New York Times (by Edward Hausner)

REFLECTING ON GREEN BERET CASE: Robert F. Marasco, former Army captain, reading mail at his home in Bloomfield, N. J. Response from public has been large, he said.