

Eight Berets Are Charged In Viet Murder

By GEORGE ESPER

SAIGON (AP) — The U.S. Army uncorked a military mystery today by charging the former commander of Green Beret forces in Vietnam and seven of his staff—including three intelligence officers — with murder and conspiracy to commit murder.

The eight are charged in the shooting of a Vietnamese man June 20 near Nha Trang, headquarters of the 5th Special Forces 200 miles northeast of Saigon. But the U.S. Command gave no details.

Charged in the slaying are Col. Robert B. Rheault, 43, a West Pointer from Vineyard Haven, Mass., who commanded the 5th Special Forces until relieved last month; two majors, three captains, a chief warrant officer and a sergeant first class.

ASSOCIATED PRESS photographer Rick Merron reported from Nha Trang that three of those charged were intelligence officers.

They were identified as Maj. Thomas C. Middleton Jr., Jefferson, S. C., group intelligence officer; Maj. David E. Crew of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, commander of a military intelligence detachment, and CWO2 Edward M. Boyle of New York City, a member of Crew's unit.

The others charged are Capt. Leland J. Brumley, Duncan, Okla.; Capt. Robert F. Marasco, Bloomfield, N. J.; Capt. Budge E. Williams, Athens, Ga., and Sgt. Alvin L. Smith Jr., Naples, Fla.

MERRON REPORTED that the Green Berets received the news of the charges with shock and dismay.

The charges are being investigated to determine if the eight will be brought to trial before an Army court-martial.

The new commander, Col. Alexander Lembers of Sparks, Nev., made a brief reference to the surprise development in a message in the Green Beret, a new monthly Special Forces publication.

"YOU ARE ALL aware of the suddenness with which I assumed command and the many questions that are in the minds of all of you," Lembers said. "As professional



—AP WIREPHOTO
COL. ROBERT B. RHEAULT

soldiers we all know how quickly situations can change and how imperative it is to remain flexible."

There was no elaboration.

Most Special Forces troopers said they were completely in the dark about the charges.

One lieutenant said: "I was at Nha Trang at the time of his (Rheault's) relief. It was announced that we have a new group commander. That was all. I asked a lot of people

about it, but no one knew what happened."

ONE SERGEANT, who claimed he was in the Nha Trang area, at the time of the incident, said he was under orders not to say anything about it.

"I knew vaguely what was going on," he added, "but things didn't start happening until the middle of July. It was then that I was told not to say anything."

They are being held at Long Binh, the Army headquarters 12 miles northeast of Saigon.

U.S. military officials would not disclose the identity of the dead man or any other details of the case. They claimed such a disclosure would prejudice the case.

MILITARY attorneys said the charges against the eight men are now in the hands of an investigating officer. He acts as the equivalent of a grand jury in civilian life, deciding whether

the men should be freed or whether they should stand trial.

The military lawyer said anyone subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice may prefer charges. The Army refused to say who brought the charges. Its announcement said the investigation was ordered by Maj. Gen. G. L. Mabry, commanding general of Army support troops in Vietnam, "following charges of premeditated murder and conspiracy to commit murder of a Vietnamese national near Nha Trang last June 20."

The Army dropped the bomb shell in an offhand manner. There was no news conference. A communique announcing the charges was quietly placed among routine press releases in a rack at the U.S. press center.

RHEAULT, whose wife and three children live in Vineyard Haven, was second in command of the 5th Special Forces Group in 1964-65 and returned to Vietnam to take command of the elite Green Berets last May 29, three weeks before the killing. He was relieved of command on July 21.

In the war, meanwhile, the battlefield lull entered its eighth week.

U.S. headquarters said there were 15 rocket and mortar attacks from 8 a. m. yesterday until 8 a. m. today and 7 Americans wounded. The rocket attacks came inside the Demilitarized Zone the American cor

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