

Furor Grows Over Double Agent Death

Compiled from AP and UPI

SAIGON — A mixup between the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and the U.S. military may have resulted in the murder accusations against eight former Army Green Berets, reliable U.S. sources said today.

Eight men including Col. Robert Rheault, 43, of Vineyard Haven, Mass., former commander of all Special Forces (Green Berets) in Vietnam are accused of slaying a Vietnamese civilian at Nha Trang June 20.

A lawyer for one of the accused said the man killed was a double agent working for both the CIA and the North Vietnamese and was wrongfully entrusted with information. His death, the lawyer said, may have saved thousands of American lives.

Sources close to the case today identified the dead man as Chu Yen Thai Khac, a Vietnamese who worked for the Special Forces as the chief of a team watching North Vietnamese infiltration trails in Cambodia.

The sources said the CIA ordered him killed after films taken secretly in Cambodia exposed him as a double agent. But in about six days the CIA withdrew the order, the sources said.

The man was killed on or about June 20, but it was not clear whether the CIA changed its orders before or after the killing.

The name Chu Yen Thai Khac was one of several that have been bandied about in speculation on the hush-hush case. Sources said that although this is the "official" name of the victim, it may be an alias.

Other sources said earlier the man was shot and his weighted body dumped into the South China Sea off Nha Trang. The body has not been recovered.

The U.S. sources said the alleged slaying was suggested by the CIA. The decision was made at the Washington level then transmitted to a secret unit of "killer teams" jointly financed by the CIA and the military, they said.

The killer teams, the sources said, were established under a counter-terror program to "get rid of" Viet Cong political officials the allies have been unable to capture in conventional ways.

A "courtesy copy" of an after-action report subsequently submitted through military channels caused the problem, the sources said. Sending such courtesy copies is normal for military units serving dual commands.

This one, however, enraged certain members of the U.S. military establishment.

The sources said the mili-

Continued Page 6, Col. 1

Continued from Page 1

tary intelligence officers took their complaint to the U.S. high command in Saigon. There it was decided to take action on the matter.

As it was first conceived, the operation would probably have remained a top secret interagency affair, the sources said.

But about two weeks ago, leaks of the episode began in the United States, forcing the Army to take formal measures, the sources said.

One main question has not been answered, the sources said. What angered the Army? Why should the well-being of a suspected dual agent excite anyone in a place where death is no stranger?

There were several theories on that:

— Traditional animosity between a ranking general in Vietnam and a former military man now in the CIA leadership.

— The possibility the agent was deliberately infiltrated into the North Vietnamese intelligence corps at the request of U.S. military intelligence.

— The agent had information valuable to the U.S. military.

— A ranking general felt it was repugnant for men wearing Army uniforms to be used as assassins.

The sources said it was unlikely the full circumstances would ever be publicly revealed. National security and the interworking of the U.S. intelligence establishment is too deeply involved, the sources said.

Meanwhile, U.S. authorities denied a petition for the release of one of the eight being held.

An official spokesman said the release was refused because of "the seriousness of the alleged offense."

The petition was filed by a civilian attorney on behalf of Maj. Thomas C. Middleton Jr., 30, of Jefferson, S.C. His lawyer contended that pretrial detention is permissible only when the accused might try to flee or is a dangerous person at large, and the petition said this was not true of Middleton.

The Pentagon also has been queried about the case by Rep. Tom S. Gettys, Middleton's congressman; Rep. John C. Culver, D-Iowa, acting on behalf of Maj. David E. Crew of Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Rep. Hastings Keith R. Mass., and Rep. Henry Helstoski, D-N.J.

Culver said he was given a Pentagon briefing but wouldn't disclose what he was told. The other three said they were given no information beyond what the Pentagon has told the public.