

BERETS RETURN, DENY KILLING



Berets at Travis: Robert Rheault, Thomas Middleton, Edward Boyle, Budge Williams, attorney Henry Rothblatt, Leland Brumley, Robert Marasco, David Crew

—Examiner photo by Bob Palmer

'Doubt Person Existed'

Sergeant Still In Vietnam

By Don Branning
Examiner News Staff

TRAVIS AIR FORCE BASE — A slight, but toughly knit Army colonel who formerly commanded all Green Berets in Vietnam flatly denied here early today that he

or any of his men executed a South Vietnamese double agent.

Col. Robert B. Rheault, 43, of Vineyard Haven, Mass., and five of the other Green Berets were freed of murder charges Monday when the Central Intelligence Agency would not let its agents testify in the Army's case against them.

Wearing fatigues and his green beret, the rapid moving, soldier-stiff Rheault turned his head aside disdainfully, when he was asked directly whether he had been in charge of executing the Vietnamese, Thai Khac Chuyen. He said, "There has been no substantiation that such an individual ever existed."

Then he added, in a brief interview after he and six of eight Berets arrived here. "War is a nasty business, with a lot of high minded objectives, like freedom and

fighting the aggressor, to justify killing people."

The one of the eight who did not come home last night was Sgt. 1-C Alvin L. Smith, of Naples, Fla. Henry B. Rothblatt, a moustached, ebullient New York attorney who was retained to represent two of the Berets, said it was Smith who went to top Army authorities with the story of the killing.

"Smith became paranoid and was afraid the others

—Turn to Page 18, Col. 1

—From Page 1

were going to knock him off," said Rothblatt.

The others, who arrived with Rheault after a 13-hour flight from Vietnam in a chartered DC-8 with 200 other GIs, are:

Capt. Leland Brumley, 27, Duncan, Okla.; Maj. David Crew, 33, Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Chief Warrant Officer Edward Boyle, 26, New York

City; Maj. Thomas Middleton Jr., 29, Jefferson, S.C.; Capt. Budge Williams, 28, Athens, Ga., and the alleged trigger man, Capt. Robert Marasco, 27, Bloomfield, N.J.

All except Boyle wore their berets as they came off the plane and through a swarm of newsmen at a half run. Marasco, in regular khaki uniform, was the only one not wearing fatigues.

After a brief conference with Rothblatt in the Travis protocol room, they came out and agreed to pose for pictures, with the stipulation that Rheault would do all the talking for the group.

After the newsmen took their pictures, Rheault turned to them and said, "You guys can bug off if you want to." But they all stayed and listened.

Asked how he'd want history to record the episode, Rheault said, "I'd rather not see it recorded as a valid his-

torical incident. It's better forgotten, just so long as people know we were exonerated."

Rheault said he saw no need for a trial to clear his name. "I believe that my honor has been cleared," he said. "We're glad the thing is not going to trial for a number of reasons.

"There was no killing," he snapped, in response to a question. There is not conclusive evidence that the individual was ever killed. There has not been any substantiation that such an individual ever existed."

Rheault denied that he knew Thai Khac Chuyen. But then, in response to a question, he admitted he had been correctly quoted by a reporter in Vietnam when he said the dead Vietnamese was probably a double agent who had penetrated the Green Berets.