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Berets 'Crime' Only a Blunder

THE SICKENING STENCH raised by the Green Berets murder case has seldom been equaled in American military history. It will not be wafted away by announcement of Secretary of the Army Resor that the charges against the eight soldiers will be dropped.

The case was a farcical cover-up from the start, such a criss-cross of bad judgments, sloppy techniques and scurrying concealments as to transgress the tradition and wording of American justice.

It cries for investigation by a special committee of the Congress, though such investigations have always been cumbersome going back to the Civil War. The Congress will probably do nothing, anyway.

Listen to one Senator, Hollings of South Carolina: "A trial would have served no good purpose for the Nixon Administration, the Army, the Green Berets or General Abrams" (Saigon commander): This inane sophism omits mention of two parties to the case paramount to the parties named, to wit, the accused soldiers themselves, and the American people, who have a right to hope their armed forces are ruled by rational, honorable and forthright values.

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THE SHELL OF THE CASE, as distinguished from the truth, is easily summarized: a Vietnamese, an alleged double agent named Chuyen, was drugged and shot. The Army charged Colonel Rheault, commanding the Green Berets, and seven subordinates, with conspiracy and murder.

The Central Intelligence Agency was implicated in a way unknown, though denying complicity. Like everything touched by the CIA, a dense fog of arcane straightway enveloped all. Nobody knew from nothing, except that eight soldiers were jailed with sordid and vicious charges against them. General Abrams ordered them tried by court martial.

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THERE WASN'T even a corpus delicti, nor for weeks, the identity of the supposed victim. The evidence, if any existed, was classified to death. It is no wonder civil lawyers retained by the accused called it a chunk of baloney.



Abruptly last week, with its prescriptive arrogance, CIA notified the Army it would not permit its agents to testify at any trial. What agents — since CIA denied involvement? In any case it was an obstruction of justice by CIA, and obviously no willing power on earth could remove the obstruction.

It is an atrocious anomaly in a free society to accuse any man of high crime, then by devious device to deny him his constitutional right to prove his innocence. These men are innocent of any crime, but they haven't been treated as innocent by the Army, the CIA, or anybody else in the United States Government. Their names are shadowed while they live.

Oh, they are glad to beat it, and their kin are glad, and we can be glad with them. But it's a hell of a way to run an army. As the minister Fouche said when Napoleon signed the warrant of execution for the Duc d'Enghein, falsely accused of treason: "It was worse than a crime; it was a blunder."

October 1, 1969