

Nixon Role In Beret Case Is Admitted

WASHINGTON (AP)—The White House acknowledged belatedly today that President Nixon was involved in events that prompted the dropping of criminal charges against six Green Beret officers accused of murdering a Vietnamese.

But press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler insisted that the Army acted on its own in deciding to drop the charges Monday.

Ziegler had said yesterday that to the best of his knowledge the President had not participated in the decision. Today he conceded that there was some involvement.



—AP WIREPHOTO.
ROBIN MOORE, author of the 1967 best-seller "The Green Berets," says he personally killed a double agent while visiting Special Forces troops in South Vietnam. Moore said in New York yesterday, "I've been to their assassination schools; I've been with them; I've personally witnessed shooting of double agents; I did one myself because it was easier for me to do than it was for them."

BY ZIEGLER'S account Richard Helms, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, made a decision that, in the interests of national security, its employes would not be permitted to testify at the planned courts martial of the Army Special Forces men.

"The President approved the decision," said Ziegler.

The press secretary said the Army made its move after being informed of the Nixon-approved CIA decision.

The Army did not seek Nixon's okay for its action but did inform the White House that the charges would be dropped, Ziegler said.

ASKED WHETHER anyone at the White House reviewed in advance Secretary of the Army Stanley R. Resor's Monday announcement, he said, "To my knowledge we did not."

He also said that no one at the White House "exerted persuasion" on the CIA or the Pentagon while the matter was under consideration.

Responding to another question, Ziegler said "there was no presidential involvement" in the initial decision to press the criminal charges.

ZIEGLER'S COMMENTS were made in response to questions about a statement by Sen. Stephen M. Young, D-Ohio, that he is convinced Nixon personally gave the order to drop the charges.

Meanwhile, the former Green Beret commander in

(Turn to Page 14, Column 1)

Continued from Page 1

Vietnam said today at Travis Air Force Base, Calif., he didn't know the alleged Vietnamese double agent he and seven of his men were accused of killing and denied there had been such a slay-

ing. "That is correct," Col. Robert B. Rheault declared when asked at a news conference if he denied there had been a killing.

"No," he said when asked if he had known the person a newsmen described as the "alleged dead man."

RHEAULT, 43, also was asked if he thought "the Vietnamese who was killed was a close political ally of President Thieu" and "Do you think this might have resulted in the case being brought against you?"

"There was no conclusive evidence that the individual was ever killed and there is certainly no indication anywhere that the alleged victim was connected with President Thieu in any way," the colonel said.

Rheault and six of the seven other Green Berets involved in the case returned to the United States from Vietnam to this California base near San Francisco the day after the Army dropped murder charges against them.

THEY HEADED for their homes shortly after the plane set down and an Army spokesman said all would get 30-day leaves.

The colonel said he believed the incident "would better be forgotten . . . so long as people remember that we were exonerated." He acted as spokesman for the others during a seven-minute session with newsmen here after a flight from Vietnam aboard a chartered jetliner that brought 219 persons here.

Rheault said he, the five other officers, a chief warrant officer, and an enlisted man, did not know Thai Khan Chuyen, their alleged victim. He insisted there was no evidence that the man had been killed.

Rheault said he could not understand why the murder and conspiracy charges were filed against them.

ARMY SECRETARY Stanley R. Resor announced Monday the charges against all eight had been dropped after the Central Intelligence Agency, for security reasons, declined to let its agents testify. He said the CIA action precluded a fair trial.

With Rheault, of Vineyard Haven, Mass., were Capt. Robert F. Marasco, 27, Bloomfield, N.J.; Maj. Thomas C. Middleton Jr., 29, Jefferson, S.C.; Maj. David Crew, 33, Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Capt. Leland J. Brumley, 27, Duncan, Okla.; Capt. Budge E. Williams, 27, Ath-

ens, Ga., and CWO2 Edward M. Boyle, 26, of New York.

All had been charged with murder and conspiracy. Charges were held in abeyance for Boyle and Sgt. 1.C. Alvin L. Smith Jr., 41, of Naples, Fla.

SMITH WAS aboard a separate flight to the United States, after his departure from Vietnam was delayed in processing.

Rheault refused to elaborate on his brief statement concerning Thai Khac Chuyen, who the Army charges said was slain June 20 near the Special Forces headquarters at Nha Trang.

As the men stepped from the plane they were greeted by attorney Henry Rothblatt of New York, who represented Crew, Brumley and Boyle. Rothblatt told reporters he feels the men were charged because of a "personal vendetta" by Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam.

Rheault was asked how he would like to see history record the incident. He replied, "I'd rather not see it recorded. It's not a particularly valid historical incident. I think it would better be forgotten. So long as people remember that we were exonerated."

The colonel said he is glad the case will not go to trial because a great deal of classified material would have been brought to light and because it would have been an agonizing ordeal for the men's families.

* SEE BRANKINS
SFEX, 1 OCT 69