



Jim Vestal for The New York Times

RETURN FROM VIETNAM: Col. Robert B. Rheault speaking to newsmen at Travis Air Force Base in Oakland, Calif. Behind him are Chief Warrant Officer Edward M. Boyle, left, and Capt. Budge E. Williams. Four other Special Forces officers returned with them.

7 Berets Return to U.S.; Deny They Killed Agent

By LAWRENCE E. DAVIES
Special to The New York Times

TRAVIS AIR FORCE BASE, Calif., Oct. 1—A lean, blond West Pointer, Col. Robert B. Rheault, once commander of the Army's 3,000 Special Forces personnel in Vietnam, led

six of his smiling comrades off a plane here today denying that they had killed an alleged Vietnamese double agent.

The chartered jet airliner brought them to this base 55 miles northwest of San Francisco scarcely more than a day and a half after the Army, with President Nixon's approval, had

dropped charges of murder and conspiracy against the group.

They had been accused of shooting Thai Khac Chuyen last June 20 and dumping his body into the South China Sea. Mr. Chuyen was said to have been an enemy agent while working for the Special Forces in Laos.

Would Return to Vietnam

Colonel Rheault, speaking for the party at a news conference here, said that he intended to stay in the Army if he could do so "as a first-class citizen."

He added that he would "be delighted to go back to serve in Vietnam," because he did "not think any professional soldier leaves Vietnam without a feeling of some regret that he is leaving the place where the

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action is and that the job is unfinished."

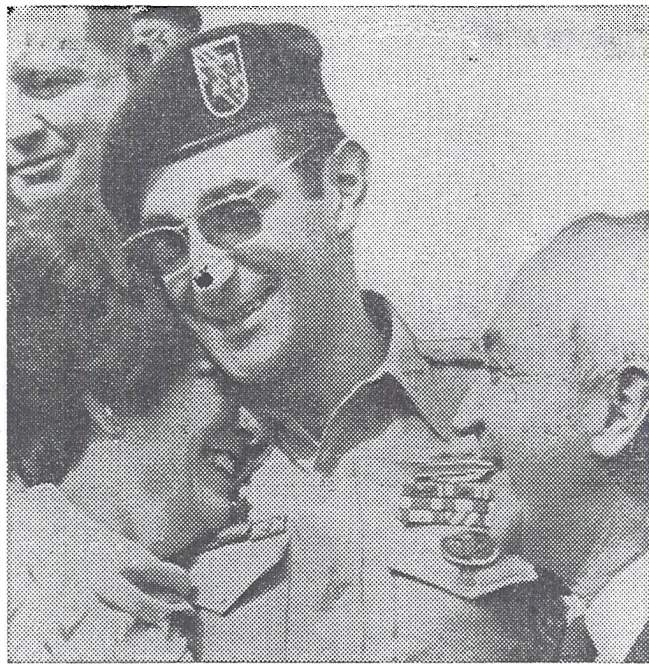
Colonel Rheault said that "the Army's been my life for 28 years" and he "would leave it with great regret."

But he let pass without comment a question whether "any of your men have given serious thought to leaving the service" because of the Green Beret episode, which has brought worldwide attention and caused embarrassment to the country.

Missing from the plane that brought more than 200 persons on the flight from Vietnam was Sgt. -st Cl. Alvin L. Smith Jr., a 41-year-old Special Forces member from Naples, Fla., who is reputed to have told the top military command in Vietnam of the alleged killing.

Sergeant Smith came on a later plane because, according to a military spokesman, he had not been processed in time to come with his seven comrades. Henry B. Rothblatt, a New York lawyer who has been representing several of the Green Berets, said that Sergeant Smith's comrades "felt sorry for him."

About 50 representatives of



The New York Times (by Ernest Sisfo)

Capt. Robert F. Marasco, named as slayer of the civilian, is met at Newark Airport by his parents, Frank and Emily.

the news media were on hand when the plane bearing Colonel Rheault and his comrades rolled to a stop in front of the lighted passenger terminal here at 1:17 A.M. (4:17 A.M. Eastern daylight time).

Smiling broadly, the colonel

skipped down the ramp, followed by his fellow officers and Chief Warrant Officer Edward M. Boyle, 26, of New York City. All of his comrades shared in his display of ebullience at being back in the United States. Friends greeted them with handshakes and hugs.

The other Green Berets were Maj. Thomas C. Middleton Jr., 29, of Jefferson, S. C.; Maj. David E. Crew, 33, of Baltimore; Capt. Leland J. Brumley, 27, of Cuncan, Okla.; Capt. Budge E. Williams, 28, of Athens, Ga., and Capt. Robert F. Marasco, 27, of Bloomfield, N. J.

Cited as 'Triggerman'

Captain Marasco was named in the Army charges, later quashed by Secretary of the Army Stanley R. Resor, as the alleged "triggerman" in the double-agent episode.

Taken immediately to a protocol room where they conferred with Mr. Rothblatt, the Special Forces officers sent word to the press that they would appear for photographs but that Colonel Rheault would do all the talking. A crowd applauded their appearance.

At 2 A.M., after the picture taking, the colonel told his as-

sociates: "You guys can bug out if you want to."

"We'll stay with you, we're together," they replied.

The barrage of questions that followed began with this one:

"How would you like to see history record this incident?"

"I'd rather not see it recorded," Colonel Rheault replied. "It's not a particularly valid historical incident. It better be forgotten as long as people remember that we were exonerated."

Cites Classified Matter

Asked if he would still like to see some of the questions about the episode answered, he said:

"I'm glad that the thing is not going to trial for a number of reasons. First of all, there is a great deal of classified information, which if revealed would not be to the best interests of the nation and of the Army. Secondly, it would be an agonizing experience for our families."

Would Colonel Rheault like to see his honor cleared?

"I believe my honor has been cleared," he shot back.

The Colonel described as "an unfounded charge" the raising of a question that the double agent episode represented "a

fight to do away with the Green Berets as a military organization and part of the Army."

Cites C.I.A. Role

On the role of the Central Intelligence Agency, he commented:

"The C.I.A. has many classified missions and it is to their best interests that these missions remain classified. They have the authority to keep their information to themselves and I think that it is better that they do so."

On the specific mission that allegedly resulted in the killing of Mr. Chuyen, the colonel was asked whether the alleged victim was "a close political ally of [President Nguyen Van] Thieu" and whether he thought that "this resulted in the case that was brought against you."

"No," he replied, "there is no conclusive evidence that the individual ever was killed and there is certainly no indication anywhere that the alleged victim was connected with Thieu in any way."

As to why the incident arose in the first place, resulting in the filing of charges by the Army, Colonel Rheault said:

"This particular question has been asked by many people,

including ourselves, time and time again and I think that this is the one question I will never be able satisfactorily to answer."

Responding to another question, he remarked:

"War is a nasty business, in which you find a number of high-sounding objectives, such as freedom against evil aggressors, to justify killing people."

Once more, Colonel Rheault was asked, "Do you deny there was a killing?"

"That is correct, he shot back.

"Sir", a questioner asked, you've been quoted as saying that you believe the alleged man . . . was a penetration agent. Your quote was, 'I believe so.' Do you stand by that?"

"Correct", the colonel replied, addin that he did not personally know the Vietnamese named as the Green Berets victim.

He also said that he did not think "a personality difference with Gen. [Creighton] Abrams," the allied commander in Vietnam, led to the double agent incident.

Colonel Rheault ended the interview with a little speech in which he said:

"On behalf of all of us, we

think that we have received

fair treatment from the press

throughout and I'd like to

thank you for that. I'm sure

you understand that there are

many questions that we cannot

answer because it's not in

the best interest of the Army,

of the operations in Vietnam

and of the nation. And I think

that it would be a great mis-

take to press for the release of

any more of this. We do not

intend to do so."

There was further applause

at the end of his speech. After

changing their clothes in the

protocol room, the men headed

for their homes on 30-day

leaves, during which each is to

receive notice reassignment.