

Beret Case Colonel Retires From Army

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 31—Apparently bitter and unsure of his future, the former Green Beret commander in Vietnam who was once charged in the bizarre murder of a South Vietnamese, retired from the Army today after 23 years of service.

The Pentagon said that Col. Robert B. Rheault had requested retirement on Tuesday, that the request had been approved and the colonel "processed" at the Pentagon yesterday. The retirement was effective at midnight tonight.

Pentagon officials said that Colonel Rheault had been offered several options on choosing a new assignment but had

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made a "personal decision" to retire.

Friends of the colonel said, however, that he was still bitter over his treatment by fellow officers when arrested and that he did not believe he could have a "normal" career.

The bitterness was apparently prompted by the manner in which he and the seven others were placed in small, solitary cells and kept nearly incommunicado after their arrest last July in the murder of Thai Khac Chuyen, a suspected Vietnamese double or triple agent.

The bitterness remained when the Army dropped prosecution of the case and deprived the colonel of what he believed was his opportunity to clear himself.

The case was dropped on Sept. 29 after the Central Intelligence Agency notified the Army that for reason of security it would not allow any of its agents in Vietnam to testify at the trial. Thus the charges were dropped for lack of cooperation rather than an Army decision that the evidence did not warrant prosecution.

After the charges were dropped, the eight members of the Special Forces, or Green Berets, were returned to the United States and granted 30 days' leave before reporting to new assignments.

The Pentagon said that Colonel Rheault had been offered—and had refused—staff jobs at the Combat Development Command, Fort Leavenworth, Kan., at the



Jim Vestal for The New York Times

Col. Robert B. Rheault

Institute of Advance Studies at the Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, Pa., and as Chief, Plans Division of the Army, Europe, in Heideleburg, Germany.

Washington friends also said he had been offered a staff job at the new automated war test facility being organized at Fort Hood, Tex., but the Pentagon denied this.

Colonel Rheault was said to have been assured by several senior officers, including at least two sympathetic senior generals, that the unproved charges would not be held against him and that this feeling had been supported by

Army Secretary Stanley R. Resor's statement that guilt could only be determined by a court and that the Army considered all eight Green Berets innocent.

But Colonel Rheault apparently never became convinced of this and was more persuaded by the "scuttlebutt" within the military establishment that his career was finished and that he would never receive his star as a general.

The colonel, a 44-year-old West Point graduate, will retire receiving 57 per cent of his regular base pay of \$17,100—a lifetime pension of \$9,747 a year.

Noting that it usually takes weeks to process retirement papers, a Pentagon spokesman said: "I think it is obvious there has been special attention directed to the careers of these officers." He indicated that the Army had made a special effort to allow Colonel Rheault to retire at the earliest possible date.

Only one other man involved in the Green Beret murder case has elected to leave the Army. Capt. Robert F. Marasco, the officer accused as the "triggerman" in the murder, requested early release from the Army in early October and was granted an honorable discharge on Oct. 14.

All the other six involved will be reporting to new posts in early November.