By HANSON W. BALDWIN


The book, which describes, ostensibly in fictional form, the activities of United States Special Forces in Vietnam, has been criticized by Pentagon and other Government agencies as implicating security and as offering propaganda material to the Communist Vietcong.

Some officials of the Central Intelligence Agency, which at various times has controlled some of the activities of the Special Forces in Laos and in Vietnam, are reported to have taken exception to the book.

The book takes its title from the green berets worn by the Special Forces. It is by Robin Moore, the pen name for Robert Lowell Moore Jr., the son of the chairman of the Finance and Executive committees, board of directors, of the Sheridan Corporation of America.

The book published by Crown Publishers, describes various incidents in Vietnam in which Special Forces units allegedly took part, including penetration by these units into Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam. It also deals with the leadership and support of the mountain tribes in operations against the Communist Pathet Lao in Laos by the Special Forces and the C.I.A., and some of the techniques, weapons and tactics used by the Special Forces.

Torture Is Described

One scene describes in detail the torture of a Vietcong sympathizer by a South Vietnamese officer in a combined South Vietnamese-Special Forces camp. Throughout the book, instances of corruption, cowardice or bureaucracy in the South Vietnamese officer corps are cited, although the author also notes instances of South Vietnamese bravery and efficiency.


The author states flatly in his first sentence that "The Green Berets is a book of truth." He says he planned "an account presenting, through a series of actual incidents, an inside informed view of the almost unknown marvelous undercover work of our Special Forces in Vietnam and countries around the world." However, he continues, he decided he "could present the truth better and more accurately in the form of fiction."

"You will find in these pages," he says, "many things that you will find hard to believe. Believe them. They helped this way. It helped this way."

The official objection to the book apparently is that it is "close to fact. General Underwood, who admitted some concern about it recently, says the concern was "self-generated."

"However," in New York, the author said that Arthur Sylvester, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, had called Nat Wartels, president of Crown Publishers, about the book, which he had read in galley form. Later, some of Mr. Sylvester's assistant visited Crown and talked with the publishers. According to Mr. Moore, it was alleged that he had violated national security and had taken advantage of the Army.

The author said he had offered his manuscript for security review but had been told the Defense Department and the services did not review fiction.

According to Mr. Sylvester, he called Crown Publishers at the request of General Underwood. Mr. Wartels, the publisher, "offered," or "agreed," according to Mr. Sylvester, to put a yellow band around the green and white dust jacket of the book. Some books that had already been distributed were recalled so that the band could be added before the addition could be made.

The band states: "Fiction Stranger than Fact?"

"Here, in a unique work of narration, are fictitious stories behind the factual story in Southeast Asia. Born out of a reporter's own experiences but blazoned by the storyteller's art, these tales of the Green Berets are a cross between Tales of the South Pacific and The Ugly American — a book bound to be widely read and hotly discussed — both pro and con."