



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR MILITARY OPERATIONS  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20310

18 September 1969

Mrs. Stephen K. Thorp  
[REDACTED]

Dear Mrs. Thorp:

On behalf of President Nixon, I am replying to your recent letter regarding alleged exploitation of our American soldiers by American businessmen who own and operate rubber plantations in Vietnam.

We understand the compelling reasons that prompted you to write, the dangers your husband is facing, and the personal sacrifices you are making. We share your hopes most earnestly that peace soon will come and the hardships of family separation will be ended.

I am uncertain as to the basis for your husband's allegations. I recognize that in any war some individuals will profit by virtue of their participation in business enterprises connected with the war effort, others by virtue of employment at relatively high wages at war connected projects, and that some will even profit by misappropriation of assets provided for prosecution of the war. However, neither the Department of State nor the Department of Defense is aware of any direct American ownership of rubber plantations in South Vietnam. The principal plantations are owned by French interests and date back to the pre-independence days of French rule.


South Vietnamese and Allied Forces in Vietnam have conducted and continue to conduct many successful operations in and around the rubber plantations of South Vietnam. While our forces are not allowed to arbitrarily destroy property and they are instructed to take every precaution during the conduct of routine operations, all unit commanders clearly understand that the security and integrity of their units is their paramount responsibility. People take priority over property. On the other side of the coin, rubber plantation owners have complained at various times of what they consider to be excessive damage due to operations; however, I would like to restate that there are no administrative or military restrictions when contact is imminent or American lives are at stake. An additional point which you may find

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of interest is the fact that rubber trees have been removed along roads and highways up to a distance of 200-300 meters throughout the country where required to protect civilian and military traffic from possible attacks or ambushes.

I trust our views in this matter will enable you to have a fuller understanding of some of the problems pertaining to Vietnam. The Department of Justice will address your other inquiries pertaining to internal social problems.

Most sincerely,



RICHARD T. KNOWLES  
Major General, GS  
Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff  
for Military Operations