

26 September 1969

Dear Elvy:

The First Team appears to be on the Presidential letter writers' list this month. The inclosed you will find interesting, not only from the allegation but also from the magnitude of the enemy force.

Again I forward them for your information with the view of being helpful.

Keep up the good work, and very best wishes to the entire First Team.

Most sincerely,

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

Major General Elvy B. Roberts  
Commanding General  
1st Cavalry Division  
APO San Francisco 96221



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

26 September 1969

Mrs. William H. Honan

Dear Mrs. Honan:

On behalf of President Nixon I am replying to your recent letter regarding the use of gas by U.S. forces in Vietnam.

Department of the Army has received no reports that substantiate the shooting of 900 enemy soldiers incapacitated by a chemical agent. Casualty reports are received daily from Headquarters, United States Army, Vietnam. A review of these reports since 1 June 1969 indicates that there were only two days on which total casualty statistics, for all battles in South Vietnam, approximated the figure of 900 enemy killed in action. The highest number of enemy killed at any one location on these dates totaled slightly more than 300. In this particular action the enemy launched a heavy attack on one of our fire support bases and was repulsed by air, artillery and individual weapons. There is no indication that riot control agents were employed in this engagement. Let me assure you that wanton killing is not sanctioned or tolerated at any level of command.

Non-lethal riot control agents which have an incapacitating effect are the only agents that have been authorized for use in Vietnam. Having served for over two years in combat units in Vietnam, I can assure you that the pros and cons of using non-lethal riot control agents are continually weighed and evaluated. We are convinced that their use is not only militarily advantageous but has resulted in saving many lives among our own forces, innocent civilians, and the enemy as well. The agent has no lasting effects but is extremely successful in causing temporary ineffectiveness in individuals due to the profuse watering of the eyes and choking sensation that it produces.

Riot control agents are used in our military operations in Vietnam under various conditions and the authority to use them is closely held by only the most senior commanders. It is employed to ferret the enemy out of

Mrs. William H. Honan

caves and tunnels, in denying specific geographical locations to enemy traffic and in causing the North Vietnamese or Viet Cong forces to use specific routes of travel. I cannot overemphasize that the overall objective of the use of riot control agents is to save lives. We have found that innocent civilians being used as hostages have been spared when a riot control agent, rather than an overt attack by men and weapons, has been employed. Our experience also shows that known enemy personnel locations and fortifications have been captured at less loss of U.S. and enemy lives when riot control agents have been used in conjunction with our tactical maneuvers. There is an increasing effort to use the most effective tactics and weapons in every combat situation in Vietnam to hold United States and Vietnamese casualties to the absolute minimum.

I recognize that your mind may not be completely at ease about the specific incident you heard about. If you can obtain more definite information as to dates, places, and units, it would be possible to make a more complete inquiry. I have taken the liberty of forwarding your letter to Major General Elvy B. Roberts who commands the 1st Air Cavalry Division now deployed along the Cambodian border. He will inform me if there is any credence to the report you heard. If there is, I will so inform you.

I trust that this letter will serve to alleviate any fears and misconceptions you may have concerning our use of chemical agents in combat and reassure you that our forces are not engaged in wanton killing.

Most sincerely,



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

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Defense  
Mrs. William H. Honan

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President Richard M. Nixon  
The White House  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President,

I urgently hope that in the  
impending talks on Vietnam  
policy, you will investigate the  
use by our forces of gas to  
incapacitate enemy troops  
who are then shot. This practice,  
which has been reported via  
letter from a GI, son of my  
neighbors here, is brutal and  
repugnant. According to this  
young soldier's letter of July,  
his outfit, an Air Cavalry

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RBI

A

unit operating near the  
Cambodian border, was issued  
gas masks in a certain situation.  
Then this gas was used on  
enemy concentrations. When  
the force of about 900 men  
emerged, they were mowed  
down by our forces, rather  
than captured as prisoners of  
war -

If the American people  
knew their young men were  
being forced to commit such  
inhuman acts there would  
be a great upsurge of demands  
to withdraw -

What if our troops were  
killed in this way! Can you  
imagine the outrage!

Sincerely

(Miss) Sally H. Howard