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10 November 1967

SUBJECT: Combat Operations After Action Report

1. Name of Operation: Battle of An Ba.
2. Date of Operation: 080700 to 082000 August.
3. Location: An Ba Hamlet, Nghia Hanh District, Quang Ngai Province, RVN.
4. Command and Control Headquarters:
 - a. 2d Battalion 35th Infantry.
 - b. Reporting Officers:
 - (1) LTC Norman L. Tiller, Sr., CO, 2d Bn 35th Inf.
 - (2) CPT Larry W. Hicks, CO, Co A, 2d Bn 35th Inf.
 - (3) CPT Harold Shankles, CO, Co A, 1st Bn 14th Inf.
 - (4) CPT James W. Lanning, CO, Co C, 2d Bn 35th Inf.
 - (5) 1LT Homer L. Krout, Platoon Leader, Reconnaissance Platoon, 2d Bn 35th Inf.

5. Task Organization:

- a. Company A, 2d Battalion 35th Infantry.
- b. Company A, 1st Battalion 14th Infantry.
- c. Company C, 2d Battalion 35th Infantry.
- d. Reconnaissance Platoon, 2d Battalion 35th Infantry.

6. Supporting Forces:

a. Artillery fire support was provided by B Btry, 2d Bn, 11th Arty and by the 2d Bn, 20th Aerial Rocket Arty. Two hundred and forty-four 155 rounds and one hundred and ninety-six 2.75 Rockets were expended in five missions and four sorties. All missions, both close support and point target, were characterized by a high degree of accuracy and speed. Five enemy were killed and numerous fortifications and bunkers destroyed. Further assessment was impossible during darkness. A vigorous H & I program was initiated upon the movement of US Forces to their night location. The enemy was unable to recover his dead or equipment during the night possibly as a result of this H & I program.

b. The 161st, 174th and 176th Assault Helicopter Companies provided aerial surveillance and gunship support. Their fires were effective in interdicting enemy escape and accounted for five enemy killed. The armed helicopters operated under control of airborne and ground commanders.

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c. 3d Brigade Aviation provided two observation helicopters. These ships, armed with two M-60 machine guns each, furnished the ground commanders with immediate information on the enemy's movement, and themselves engaged and killed a total of sixteen VC.

d. 366th TAC Fighter Wing, USAF, and Marine Air Group 12, USMC delivered two immediate airstrikes. Ordnance consisted of sixteen 250 pound bombs, six 500 pound bombs, eight 750 pound napalm bombs and 20mm cannon. Both strikes were controlled by the 3d Brigade's attached Forward Air Controller and were used to block enemy withdrawal, to destroy fortifications and to engage observed enemy soldiers. A ground evaluation could not be made on the day of contact.

7. Intelligence:

The enemy was estimated to have a company size force of 160 men located on a hill mass at BS675565. They were reported to be equipped with the following weapons: three .30 cal MG, fifty AK-47 rifles, two 82mm mortars, several M-1 carbines, and a few M-2 carbines. It was anticipated that when US troops entered this area they would encounter the enemy hiding in holes and tunnels and that it would be necessary for friendly forces to conduct a thorough and methodical search to find the enemy. Once elements of the 2-35 were inserted, the units could expect small arms fire and booby-traps throughout the area. The above intelligence information was obtained from a "Hoi Chanh" who surrendered to 2d Bn 4th ARVN Regt. When "A" Company, "C" Company and the Reconnaissance Platoon 2-35 made a combat assault into this suspected enemy location, they failed to make contact. However, C/2-35 did discover several entrances to spider holes and tunnels as well as signs of fresh digging. The enemy was sighted moving north and northwest toward the Song Ve River by pilots flying observation helicopters and gunships. The maneuver elements of the 2-35 were committed to move north in pursuit of the fleeing enemy. Contact was made and the Battle of An Ba ensued against an estimated enemy force of approximately 100 men. The conflict began about 1000 meters north of the initial insertion. The fight was waged in and around small hamlets encircled by trenches and hedgerows which provided the enemy with good fields of fire, cover from small arms ground fire and concealment from aerial observation. The captured documents from the Battle of An Ba proved conclusively that the 2-35 had engaged elements of the 38th VCLF Battalion. It is believed that the Headquarters of the 38th Battalion and elements of the 3d Company of this enemy battalion were the main antagonists in the contact. This is based on the fact that several of the captured documents contained the unit designations of the 38th Battalion and the 3d Company. The quantity and the various documents captured were those that would normally be produced by or processed through a battalion headquarters. There were several documents which referred to the battalion commander of the 38th Battalion and the company commander of the 3d Company. This information, combined with the capture of three pistols, two US .45 cal and one 9mm Browning pistol, supports the conclusion that these two officers were killed in the Battle of An Ba. The collected intelligence which led to the planning of this operation was considered timely, accurate, and contained sufficient information to deploy the correct amount of force in the vicinity of the enemy.

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8. Mission:

a. A/2-35, C/2-35, and Recon 2-35 were assigned search and destroy missions. A/1-14 originally had a mission of establishing blocking positions. Later their mission was changed to search and destroy.

9. Concept of Operation:

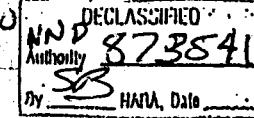
a. A/2-35 was to make a combat assault vic BS669560; C/2-35 was to combat assault into vic BS675560; Recon Platoon was to make a combat assault vic BS679573. All three elements were to conduct search and destroy operations from their LZ locations toward the hill mass vic BS676564. After the combat assaults were completed the enemy was observed fleeing to the north and to the northeast. The concept then was altered to the effect that all three of the maneuver elements were to pursue to the north while a fourth element, A/1-14, was to be combat assaulted vic BS648573 to establish blocking positions on the west. The Recon Platoon was to move to the northeast and to block the eastern flank of the enemy; meanwhile, A/2-35 and C/2-35 were to push the enemy northward toward the Song Ve River.

10. Execution:

a. In an effort to capitalize on the intelligence received from the "Hoi Chanh" on 6 August, the Battalion Commander, LTC Tiller, formulated an operations plan to combat assault elements into three locations surrounding the target hill on the following day (7 August). This plan, however, involved an extension of the battalion's present AO along the 70 grid line on the west to the 66 north-south line. The request for this extension was disapproved for 7 August. The battalion commander repeated his request for the extension the following day and was able to obtain a boundary extension to the 66 vertical grid line from 080001 August to 092400 August. On the evening of 7 August plans were finalized and the operations order issued to the commanders involved.

b. Once they were on the ground, all three maneuver elements began to deploy according to the original plan. At the same time, "Aloha" ships (observation helicopters from 3d Brigade Aviation) observed armed VC in the vic of BS684582 to the northeast of Recon. Armed helicopters were requested at 0807 hr and at 0935 the gunships (Sharks) reported to LTC Tiller that "Aloha" ships had killed three or four enemy. "Aloha" estimated the observed enemy force to be two reinforced squads and said they appeared to be fleeing to the north toward the Song Ve River. (See Sketch #1) The "Aloha" birds, meanwhile, had killed two additional VC and had spotted numerous others with weapons and web gear along the southern bank of the Song Ve. It became apparent that the enemy force was located north of the original target area in the hamlet of An Ba along the southern bank of the Song Ve. It was anticipated that the fleeing enemy would attempt to cross the Song Ve or to evade to the east.

c. As Recon and A/2-35 (-) moved northward, the "Shark" gunships spotted armed VC running to the east and west. The "Sharks" advised Recon of the enemy disposition, and Recon began to maneuver to block the enemy's eastern escape route. At 1030 hours, C Company was ordered to move from their southern blocking positions to the north to BS675578 on the east flank of A Company. At 1033 hours, Recon made contact with a small force and killed one VC at BS686583. (See Sketch #1) A Company's



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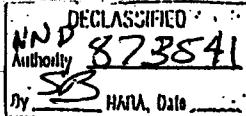
platoon on the original search mission was ordered to join the company and effected link-up at 1105 hr. At that time, A Company was in contact with an unknown size force firing from the west and had suffered two friendly WIAs at BS665576. When it appeared that elements of the enemy force might escape to the west, the battalion commander alerted Company A, 1st Battalion, 14th Infantry to prepare for deployment to the west of the contact area. By 1125 hr A/2-35 had a friendly casualty count of two WIA and one KIA and estimated the enemy to be a platoon. An AO extension was requested westward to the 64 north-south grid line. Ships were sent to A/1-14's pickup site at BS776430. At 1205 hours, the first lift of A/1-14 touched down at BS648573. The air assault was completed by 1232 hours without incident. A total of four maneuver elements had been committed, then, and were strategically placed to prevent the enemy from escaping: Recon Platoon was positioned along the eastern edge of the hamlet area; C/2-35 on the southeast and A/2-35 on the southwest were pushing northward; A/1-14 was closing in from west to east. The enemy was trapped against the southern bank of the Song Ve River, over which the armed gunships and observation helicopters maintained a deadly vigil. (See sketch #2).

d. As the ground forces closed in on the trapped VC, a series of short contacts were made: At 1237 hours A/2-35 reported three enemy killed and one weapon captured at BS663576; C/2-35 killed seven VC and captured five weapons in the vic of BS673577 at 1243 hours; A/1-14 reported seven enemy KIA and three weapons captured at 1330 hours, and the "Alchá" birds, going off station at 1333 hours, submitted a total count of sixteen VC killed. At 1358 hours a VC grenade wounded one man from C Company who was evacuated immediately by the battalion command and control ship. The Recon Platoon, working with the "Musket" gunships, reported four additional enemy KIA at 1411 hours at BS697585. Three additional VC killed and two more weapons captured were reported by A/1-14 at 1411 hours. (See sketch #2).

e. Two immediate airstrikes were called for. The first strike went in at 1415 hours and was followed at 1430 hours by another. The target for both of the airstrikes was the densely vegetated village strip along the northern edge of the Song Ve River vic BS665586. (See Sketch #2) The battalion S3 requested a PSYOPS team from brigade and at 1500 hours the team was inserted with A/2-35 to exploit the growing success against the pinned enemy.

f. The ground elements continued to mop up throughout the contact areas. Once A/2-35 and C/2-35 had pushed all the way to the river bank, they turned to the east and began a careful search of the village area with A Company on the north and C Company on the south. (See sketch #3) A/1-14 also continued to move eastward, following A/2-35 and C/2-35, and collecting one more VC KIA and an additional weapon at BS675583 at 1745 hours. By 1800 hours all contact had subsided, and preparations were made to extract two of the companies. (See sketch #4) A/2-35 and the Reconnaissance Platoon secured a pickup zone at BS678583. A/1-14 was extracted to LZ LIZ, completing the lift at 1840 hours. At 1912 hours the last lift of C/2-35 went into LZ DRAGON, and A/2-35 and Recon/2-35 moved to BS679570 to establish a combined night defensive perimeter, closing at 1940 hours. (See sketch #4).

g. Contact with the enemy was intermittent throughout the period 080825 to 081745 August. Range of engagement varied from one meter to one



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hundred and fifty meters. Communications within the contact area was good, but a relay station was required between the operating units and the battalion CP, located at LZ LIZ, BS755431. The relay station was located on LZ DRAGON, BS730528.

11. Results:

a. Enemy personnel losses:

- (1) KIA..... 65
- (2) CIA..... 3

b. Enemy weapons captured:

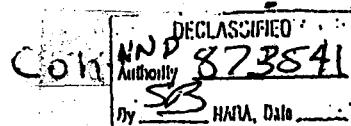
- (1) M-1 Carbines..... 8
- (2) M-2 Carbines..... 1
- (3) M-1 Rifles..... 2
- (4) BAR's..... 2
- (5) M-79..... 1
- (6) .45 Cal Pistols..... 2
- (7) SKS..... 1
- (8) MAT-49..... 3
- (9) 9mm Pistol..... 1

c. Enemy equipment losses:

- (1) One PRC - 10 Radio
- (2) 630 rounds .30 cal ammo
- (3) 700 rounds 7.62 short ammo
- (4) Twenty-three M-79 rounds
- (5) Eighteen BAR magazines
- (6) Miscellaneous web gear
- (7) Miscellaneous documents

d. Friendly Personnel Losses:

- (1) A/2-35..... 3 WIA, 1 KIA
- (2) A/1-14..... 3 WIA



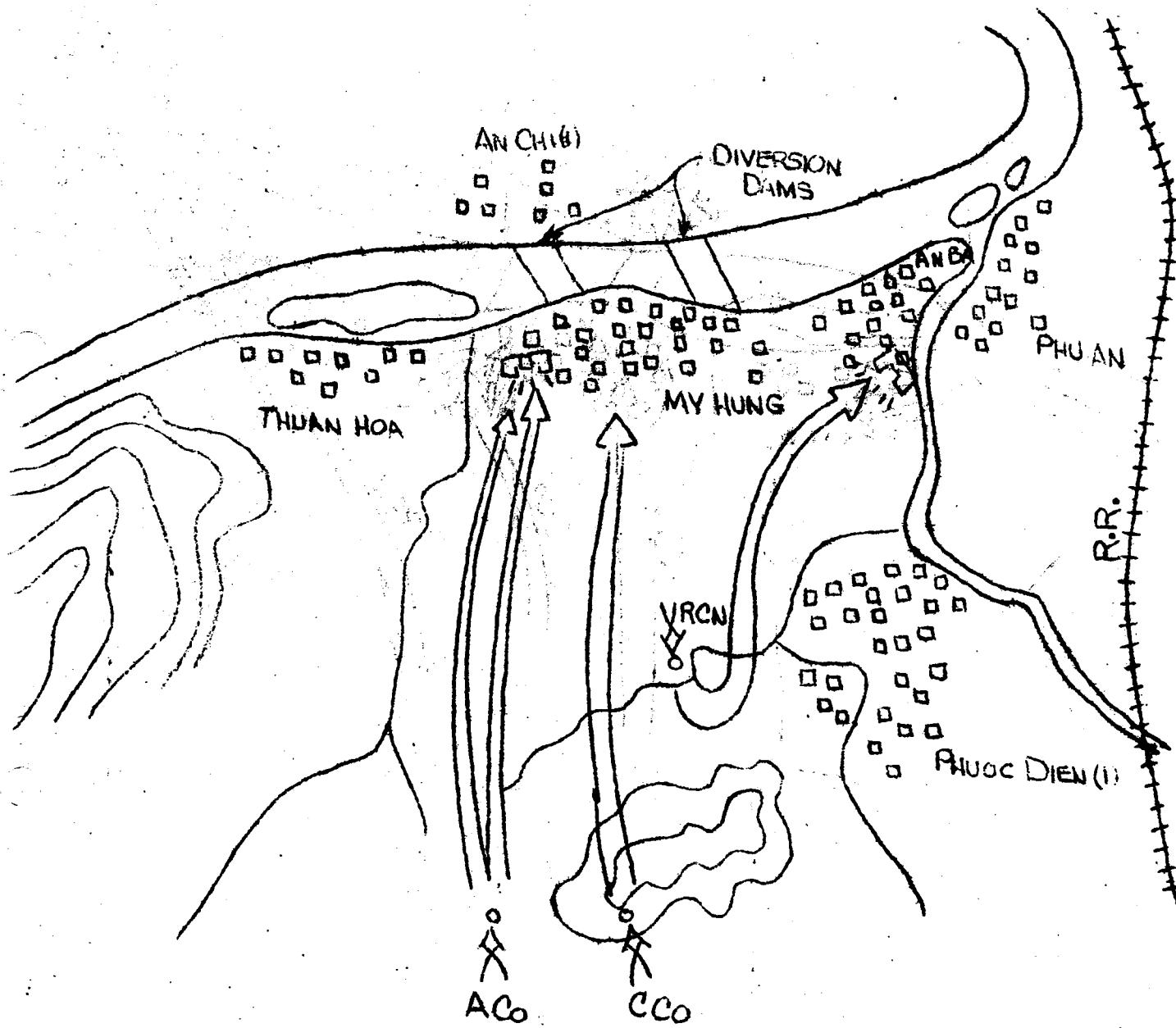
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(3) C/2-35..... WIA

12. Commanders Analysis

a. This action, a typical employment of a battalion sized force, was initiated by a report from a "Hoi Chanh". As with most such reports there is some truth in them but they are far from being factual. In this specific case, contact was never made with the reported unit nor was the contact at the reported enemy location. However, the battalion was able to rapidly exploit the information gained by the "Aloha" team who detected the enemy movement to the north. As the enemy had placed himself next to the Song Ve River, his routes of withdrawal were extremely limited. Once his positions and forces were located it was relatively easy to fix him with ground maneuvers and one combat assault. Upon completion of the maneuvers, all that remained was for our forces to close with and kill the VC. Contacts of this nature are of short duration as the enemy does not possess the combat power to fight on equal terms with our forces. His principal tactic is to delay our maneuvers and fade away into the surrounding area. In this case his tactic failed as he was surrounded on all sides and our units conducted a deliberate search locating the individual VC in his "fade away" holes. By far the great majority of enemy killed were taken from holes in which they were hiding. Had a deliberate search not been conducted the enemy probably would have been successful in escaping with the majority of his unit; however, as it was, only a handful of enemy evaded to tell the story of defeat.

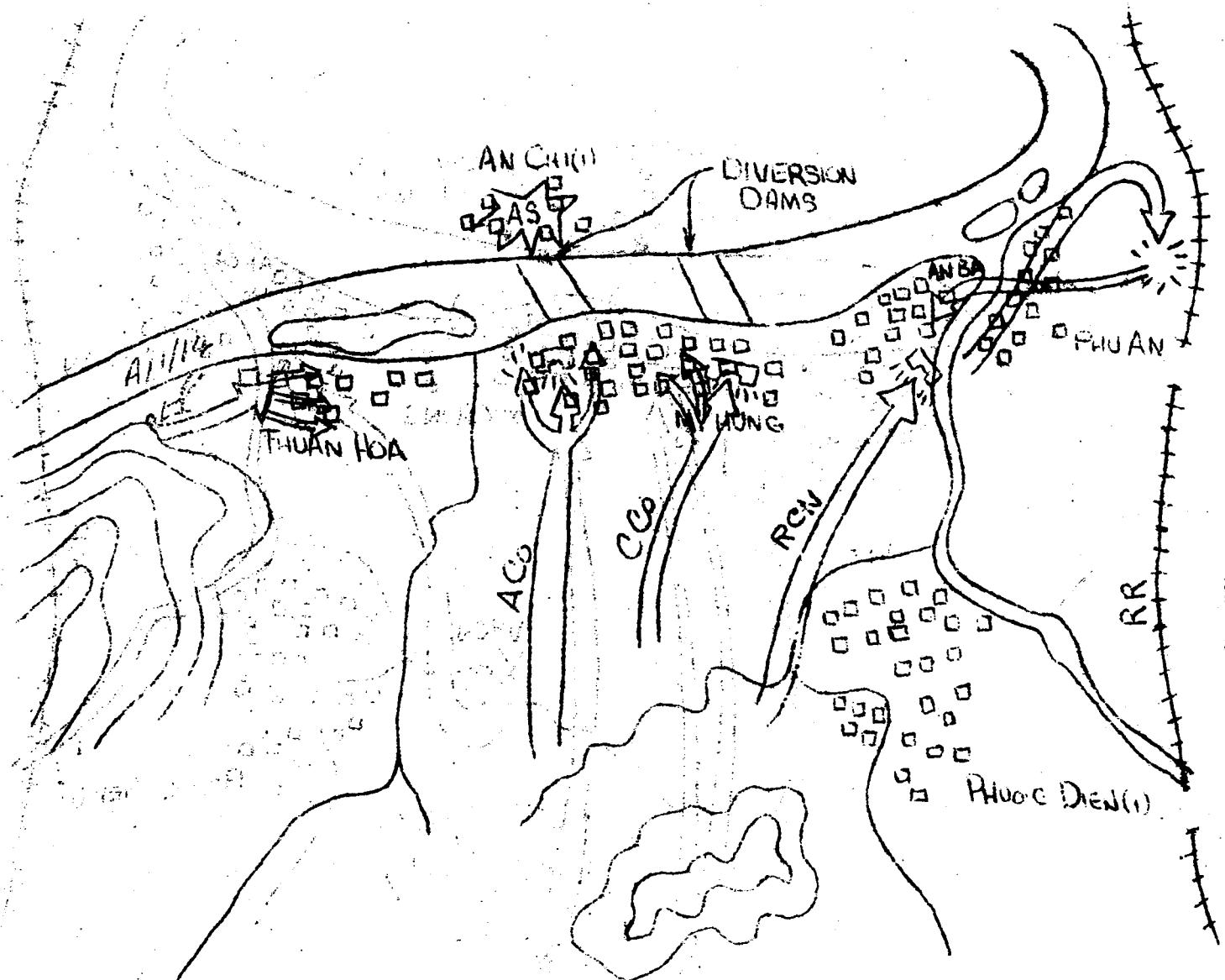
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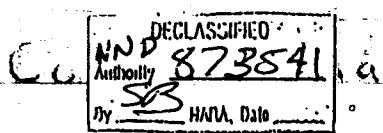
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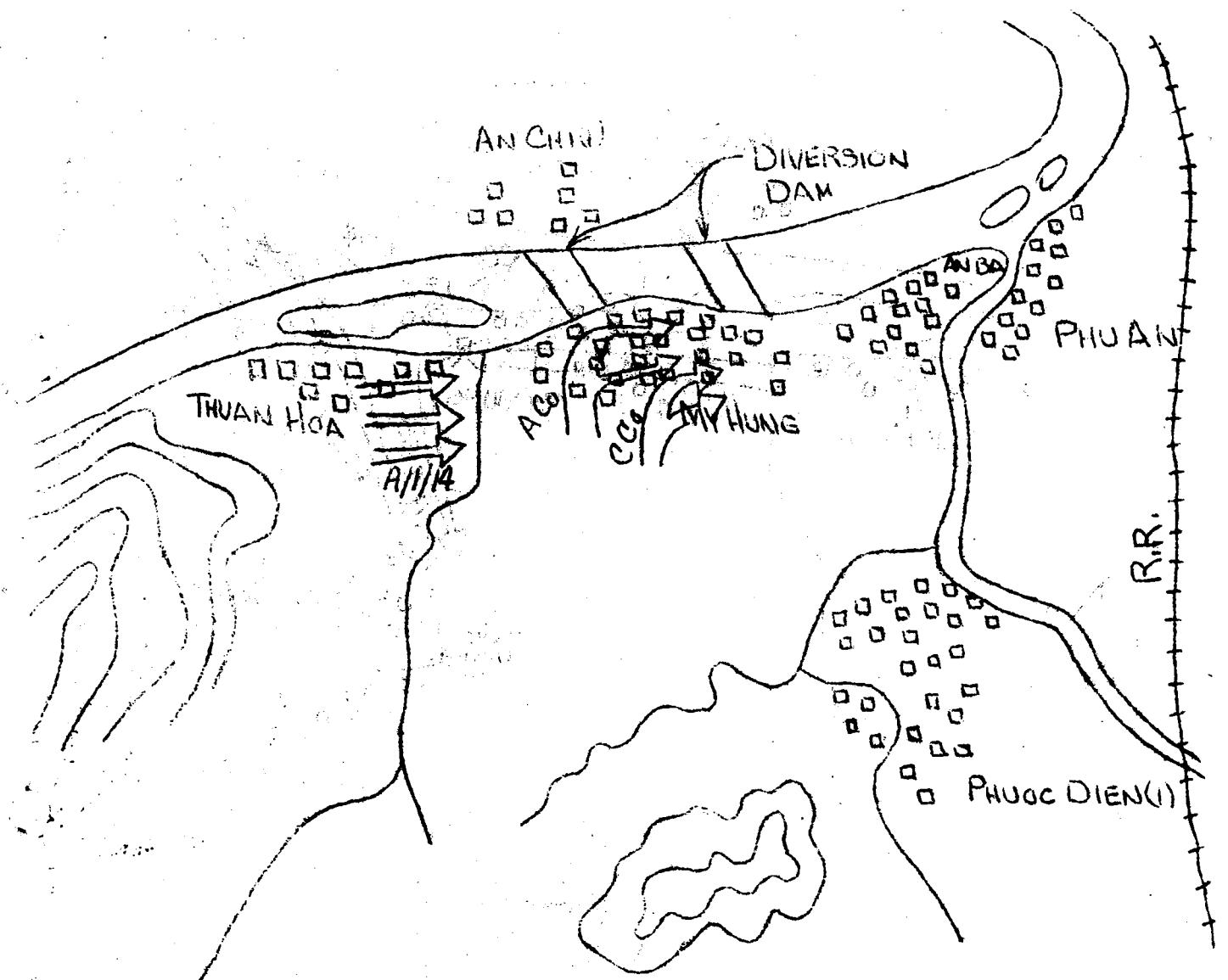
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