

RG 472
11th ACR, 53
AARs
Box 3

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
28TH MILITARY HISTORY DETACHMENT
11TH ARMORED CAVALRY REGIMENT
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96257

AVIG-WE

4 February 70

SUBJECT: Combat After Action Report

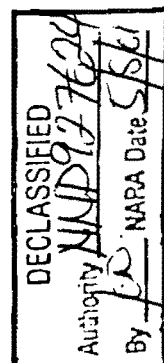
THRU: Commanding General
United States Army, Vietnam
ATTN: Command Historian
APO San Francisco 96375

DOWNGRADED AT 1 YEAR
DURING 1971

TO: Headquarters
Department of the Army
ATTN: O. C. M. H.
Washington, D. C. 20315

1. NAME AND TYPE OF OPERATION: An attempted ambush near AP THANH PHUNG, during Operation KENTUCKY COUGAR.
2. DATE OF BATTLE: 21 January 1970.
3. LOCATION: Reference Map Series L7014, Sheet Number 6332 IV, LOC NINH sheet of BINH LONG Province, Republic of Vietnam.
4. CONTROL HEADQUARTERS: 11th ACR, QUAN LOI, VIETNAM.
5. PERSONS BEING INTERVIEWED: Mentioned by name in EXECUTION section.
6. TASK ORGANIZATION: Integral necessity in EXECUTION section.
7. SUPPORTING FORCES: Integral necessity in EXECUTION section.
8. BACKGROUND INFORMATION: Contained in EXECUTION section.
9. INTERVIEWING SPECIALIST: Enlisted personnel of the 28th Military History Detachment.
10. INTELLIGENCE: Loi Van Canh, political officer of K1 Battalion, 141st NVA Regiment, probably lectured the battalion on 20 January at their basecamp at XU 773192 prior to the march to forward ambush

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positions at XU 760160. His lesson plan came from his notebook, which contained a history of the 7th NVA Division. To add weight to his political exhortations, he probably mentioned that "the 141st NVA Regiment had killed 645,000 Americans and Vietnamese during 1969" --- and further exhorted the battalion to continue the proud tradition to the final victory. Past intelligence has shown that the political officer's task has become increasingly difficult; the losses inflicted by US forces cannot be denied by even blatant lies. Canh may have spent many worried nights rereading the section of his notebook titled, "Responsibilities of the Political Officer at the Battalion Level." (1)

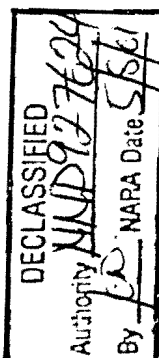
The Commander of the NVA forces probably attended the lecture as an example to his men, and to avoid being accused of lacking the Communist spirit. He may have politely listened; he did not accept it. He knew well the limitations of his forces; he knew the power of the 11th Armored Cavalry and the artillery, gunships and tactical air which supports it in battle. From his intelligence in the LOC NINH AREA, he may have known that the First Squadron, 11th ACR (composed only of B and C Troops), had reconned east of FSB DENNIS on Jan 19. He could guess that within days the armor would follow the road north, reconning towards his basecamp. He also guessed that the armor would follow the ridge lines, or fingers, turning off the road to proceed due north. The ridge lines would be high ground; the armor forces would tactically hold the high ground. That would be the place for the ambush. Despite the political officer's propaganda, the Commander knew that the best results he could hope for against armor would be an ambush from well-concealed bunkers with overhead cover. The bunkers should lie along the ridge, forcing the armor to assault up-hill.

When he assessed his forces, he might have smiled. Besides the two battalions (K1 and K2, at 75% strength), his forces were reinforced by the C22 Transportation Company (which has no trucks, but 100% RPG teams). Thus he had the standard NVA ratio of forces: one battalion reinforced by RPG teams to ambush one armored troop. What caused him to smile was the additional 57mm and 75mm recoilless rifles, five .51 caliber machineguns, and new equipment his forces had recently received.

The recent resupply of the 141st NVA Regiment had brought new RPG-2 launchers and rockets, new uniforms, Ho Chi Minh sandals and fresh, pre-

(1) This portion of the narrative was deduced from explicit documents, diagrams, found after the battle by B, C, F, and G Troops, 11th ACR. Lai Van Canh's notebook, with the "facts" mentioned was found, along with other documents which made this section possible. The analysis of the NVA Commander's plans are of course, de facto; what he did is known, inductively we can hypothesize. The weapons and resupply commentary was proved by the equipment and weapons captured after the battle. From the 11th ACR INTSUM 022-70, which contains the complete documents, and the past intelligence on the 141st Regimental methods, this was written. (See Inclosure 1)

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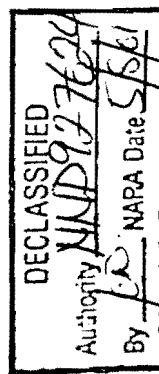
-cooked rice and bags of rice. To instill esprit de corps and enthusiasm in the unit, the men had been issued new pith helmets and red-and-blue scarves. Most likely the scarves lifted the morale of the battalion's teen-agers more than the political officer's lagging efforts. The Commander and the political officer may have grinly guessed that the young would die first; the older veterans would know when to run from the ever-advancing armor, artillery, gunships and tactical air strikes that would eliminate any chance of escape.

The Commander moved his men into ambush position the night of January 20, moving perhaps four kilometers. The ambush position was in the rubber along the ridges at XU 760160. The dug Z-shaped bunkers, between four and five feet deep. Although the bunkers had overhead cover of logs, dirt and leaves, they were no more than one foot above ground. The firing slits on the legs of the "Z" shape were small; the openings were only inches above ground. The slits were roofed with a fine lattice-work of bamboo and leaves which would conceal the barrels and muzzle flashes. The commander knew the bunkers must be invisible from the air, appearing to be normal terrain. If the Blackhorse helicopters' visual reconnaissance spotted the bunkers, the NVA forces would be shelled, strafed, bombed, and gassed with CS or all four combinations. Then the armor would display mobility that would threaten total annihilation of his retreating forces. They would find his northern basecamp, and make Cambodia his only salvation. But the ambush site was well-chosen. His forces occupied the high ground and the bunkers would conceal the fire until the Blackhorse Troopers were in the kill zone of the two L-shaped ambush sites. There were three streams in the area, running north-south, or northeast - southwest. They were the natural escape routes when the Blackhorse inevitably changed the course of the battle.

But the NVA Commander had contingency plans, too. If the armor forces did not recon along the ridges and fall into his ambush, then his ready reaction force, three kilometers due north of the ambush site, would engage them. He would have forces on the front and rear flanks of the armor. He probably did not expect B and C Troop until 22 or 23 January. Since the NVA had field rations of orange-sized rice balls, and also bag rice, which has to be cooked, they may have expected to be in position for several days. B Troop, 1/11th ACR found a note after the battle which stated, "find an area with good fields of fire..... on the 21st, send out three men from one company to recon the battle-field. The rest areas must have bunkers which can withstand artillery. "

11. EXECUTION: The First Squadron of the 11th ACR had only B, C and HHT Troops and the Howitzer Battery in the LOC NINH AO because A Troop was under the operational control of the First Brigade, First Cavalry Division (AM) and D Company (tank company) was under the operational control of the 199th Light Infantry Brigade (sep).

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The First Squadron was given the mission of conducting ground reconnaissance in the LOC NINH area. It also had the mission of conducting operations with companies 5, 6, and 7 of the 2/9th Infantry (ARVN) and RF/PF forces. The Second Squadron, 11th ACR, operated north of LOC NINH, in the BU DOP area and could react and reinforce the First Squadron.

In August and September, 1969, the First Squadron defended LOC NINH successfully against superior enemy forces (2). The First Squadron had beaten decisively both the 141st and 165th NVA Regiments. The troopers were well-acquainted with the NVA bunkers with overhead cover, and familiar with that portion of the rubber.

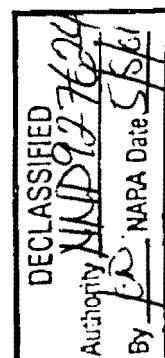
On January 19 B and C Troops reconned east of FSB DENNIS which was the location of the Squadron headquarters and troop and howitzer battery. On 20 January the troops reconned in the vicinity of FSB DENNIS. That day two SPAR readings were recorded at XU 7319 and XU 8019. Thus it was decided that on the 21st the two troops would recon north of FSB DENNIS, to the SPAR locations. The troops would follow the northern road, and when the road curved east, they would stay north, following the ridges that led to one of the SPAR locations. (See sketch of B and C Troop movement). The two-pronged sweep would allow each troop to react to the other and tactically always hold the high ground.

At 0700 hours the troopers began the road march. Twenty minutes later, as they turned off the road, they noticed the rubber workers leaving, heading for their homes. The suspiciousness of this incident did not have time to sink in, for ten minutes later the contact began. C Troop, which led the march, turned from the road and headed for the ridge in column. About 0740 hours the lead element received recoilless rifle, RPG and small-arms fire at XU 760160. Although some fire came from positions northwest of them, the main fire was from the northeast, so the troop quickly formed on line and advanced slowly up the hill to the bunkers.

Meanwhile, B Troop had proceeded about two kilometers, turned off the road and headed for the small bridge over a stream running north-east to southwest. As soon as the rear element crossed the bridge, the lead element received fire. The troop initially formed on line to the southwest, towards C Troop, but then reversed direction as the enemy fire locations became evident. The enemy was in a bunker line running east and west, but north of B Troop. The enemy maintained poor fire discipline; the fire from the northeast was premature, allowing B Troop to successfully reverse course and combat assault the corner of the line. At 0745 hours the First Squadron Commander reported the contact to Regimental Headquarters and requested a Blue Max and a Light Fire Team.

(2) These battles are recorded in the Combat After Action Report of the Battle of Northern BINH LONG Province. (C)

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The Regimental Commander was soon on the site, and at 0828 hours reported ground-to-air fire at XU 778168. (See sketch of enemy positions.)

Captain Ronald G. Caldwell, First Squadron Assistant S-3, alternated command and control ships with the Squadron Commander. "It was rubber with leaves, and in that canopy, I couldn't see the troops. They were popping smoke almost continually for someone," he commented. CPT Caldwell directed artillery on the stream beds, the most likely escape route. The artillery blocking fires covered all three streams. (see sketch). "The Blue Max worked out in supporting the troops, and hit some of the ground-to-air machinegun positions," he added.

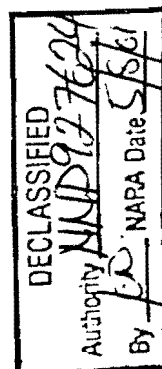
C Troop had swept the initial bunker line and discovered an enemy strong point on the ridge above them. They assaulted the enemy, slowly climbing and raking the enemy positions. B Troop, meanwhile, had again changed position and proceeded due east, assaulting along the long leg of the L. By 0917 hours B Troop had progressed to XU 742165. B Troop was taking recoilless rifle fire, along with small-arms and RPGs. The enemy countered C Troop's assault of the ridge with mortar fire, but it did not deter the armor crush. At 0930 hours B Troop took documents from a dead NVA and immediately interpreters began translating what later in the day would be a significant intelligence find.

At 0952 hours another ship reported ground-to-air fire at XU 778168. At 1005 hours Major Abbey, Commander of the Blackhorse Air Cavalry Troop, drew .51 caliber machinegun fire and was forced to land at the LOC NINH MACV landing pad. The Blue Max worked out on these positions, and tactical air strikes were called in requiring the ground troops to keep popping the smoke grenades, to insure that air strikes were the required five kilometers away. The air strikes hit the northernmost escape route, a stream bed, and the anti-aircraft positions. The Light Fire Team hit three .51 caliber machinegun positions north of the bunkers that B Troop assaulted.

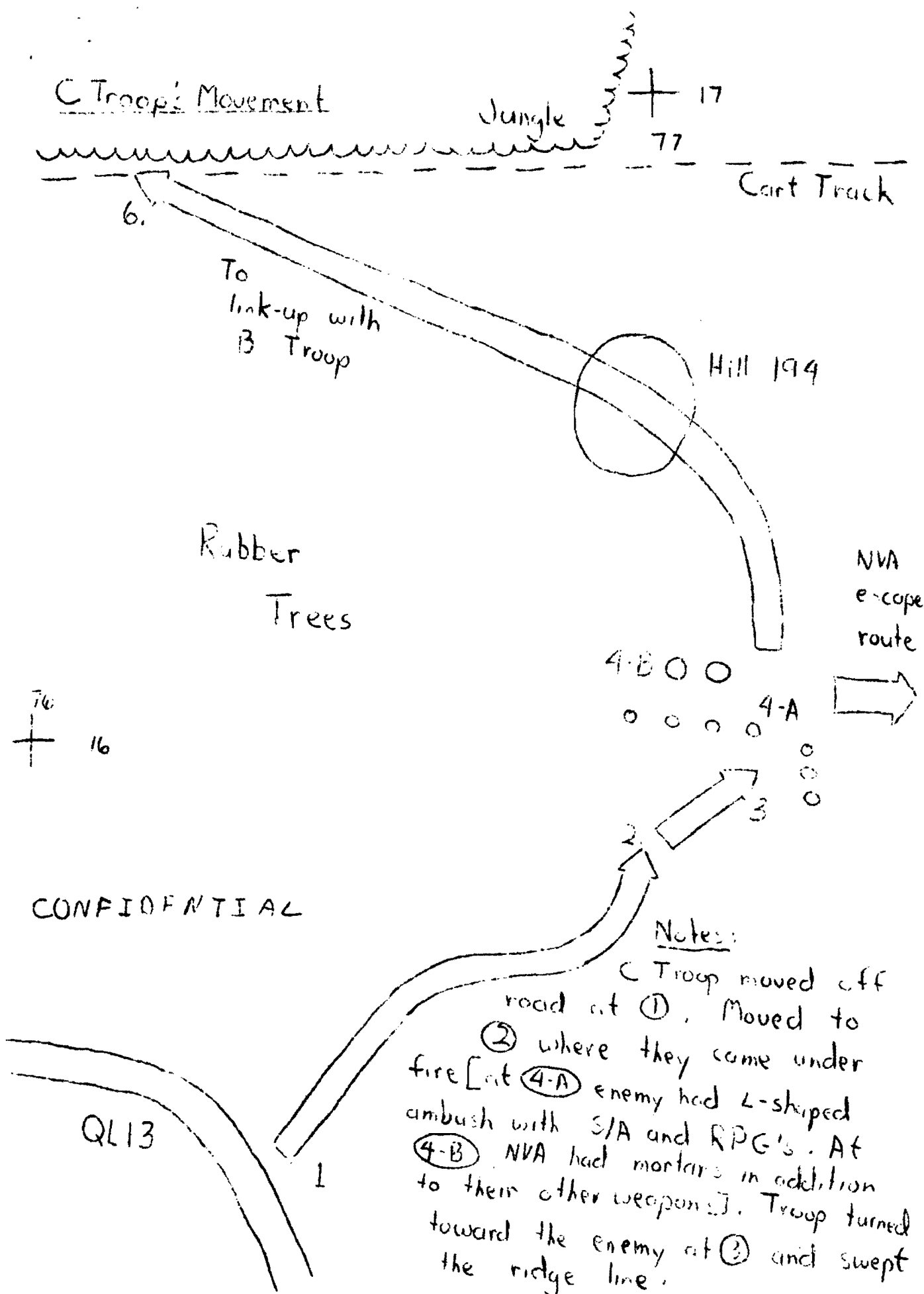
C Troop swept its ridge, and headed for B Troop, for a link-up that would combine the troops in a sweep north to destroy the remaining NVA forces. Each Troop Commander had changed direction three times. When the troops returned fire and won fire superiority, they ceased firing to pinpoint the enemy locations. When the enemy's strongest points of fire were discovered, the troop assaulted. The two troops proceeded slowly, but consistently with maintaining fire superiority. Since they were always assaulting up-hill, and without dismounted troops, they could advance only when sure that no NVA remained to their rear or flanks. "You can fire you .50 calibers and M60's all day, but if you aren't firing exactly at the enemy, he'll pop up, take careful aim and blast you," commented CPT Caldwell.

The superior marksmanship and relentless advance of the armored troops produced a desperate response from the enemy. One NVA platoon left the bunkers and attempted to maneuver to the rear flank of the troop. "As soon as you saw a NVA fall, there were several more dragging the body away," said Sergeant First Class Murphy. The NVA platoon simply provided better targets for the troopers, and was soon cut to ribbons.

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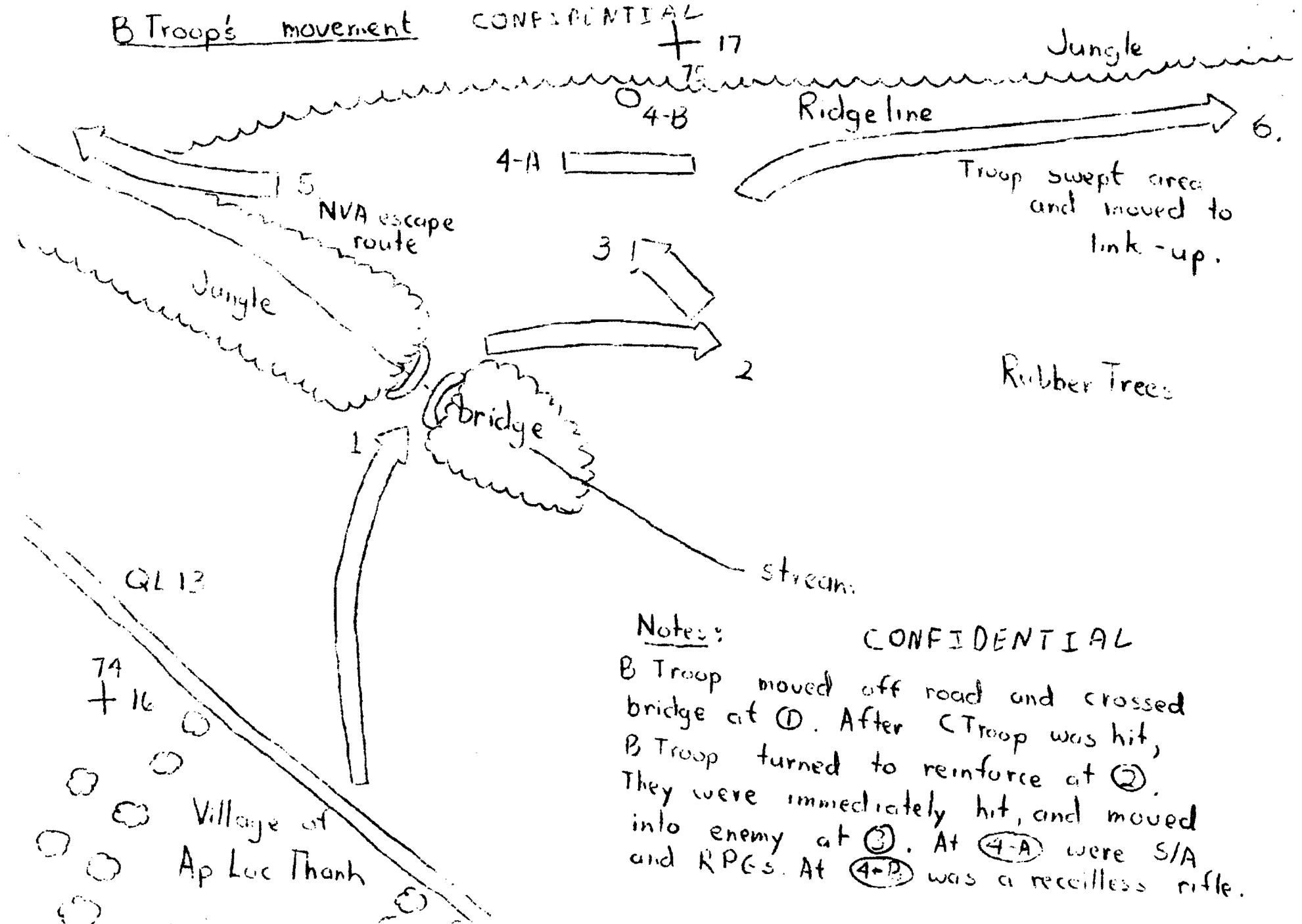


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B Troop's movement

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Notes:

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B Troop moved off road and crossed bridge at ①. After C Troop was hit, B Troop turned to reinforce at ②. They were immediately hit, and moved into enemy at ③. At ④-A were S/A and RPGs. At ④-B was a recoilless rifle.

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At 1100 hours B and C Troop linked-up and began the rapid sweep north. They entered the beginning of the basecamp and found 35 NVA bodies. The enemy was in complete rout, and by 1142 hours the firing had ceased. B and C Troops also found 1 57mm recoilless rifle, 4 RPG-2 launchers, 1 60mm mortar, 16 60mm rounds, 9 rounds of 82mm mortars, 7 AK-47's and 10 ChiCom grenades. By 1225 hours the interpreters had translated the documents which identified the location of the two main enemy base camps and tactical air strikes were directed there.

Although 2 M551 Sheridans and 2 ACAVs were literally blown apart by combinations of recoilless rifle and RPG fire, only one Trooper from C was killed, and nine were wounded. B Troop suffered only six wounded. Of the fifteen wounded, only seven men suffered serious wounds.

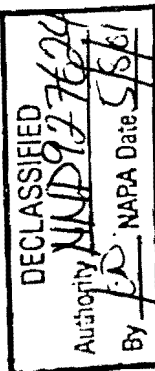
F and G Troops, 2/11 ACR, were called upon early in the contact to react. They moved out from the BU DOP area and at 0914 hours G Troop reported an estimated company moved south through FSB EUNICE leaving sandal prints in the road. At 1033 hours G Troop received small-arms and RPG fire from the north side of the road at XU 792145 and returned fire with their organic weapons. They did not stop, however, but continued on to the First Squadron Contact. They took no casualties, and enemy losses were unknown. About 1450 hours, G Troop entered the C Troop contact area at XU 772162 and found two bundles of enemy documents. F Troop pushed on north to the basecamp mentioned earlier in the documents captured by C Troop. F Troop proceeded on the east side of the northern most stream, and B and C Troops swept the west side. At 1540 hours F Troop found documents on a dead NVA.

At 1608 hours, G Troop entered the contact area of B and C Troops, at XU 775150 and pursued the trails there. Seventeen minutes later they received small-arms and mortar fire from the south at XU 775130. They suffered no casualties in the brief firefight, but killed 4 NVA. Artillery and a Light Fire Team supported the contact.

Captain Lynn Hunt, soon to be commander of B Troop, who manned a M-60 machinegun in the contact, commented, "The ground troops had the situation under control at all times--- nothing we couldn't handle. But you can't tell when the enemy will reinforce, so it's always good to have the support. "

On the next day, B Troop further searched its contact area and found three more NVA bodies buried on the site. The final total was 41 NVA killed. They also found 9 60mm rounds, a 57mm recoilless rifle and round 100 AK-47's rounds, and 2 ChiCom claymores. B and C Troop fought a well-armed, numerically superior enemy on his own choice of field, and beat him.

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Notes:

B/1/11 made contact at ①
after Troop made contact
at ②. They swept to
③ where they linked-up.

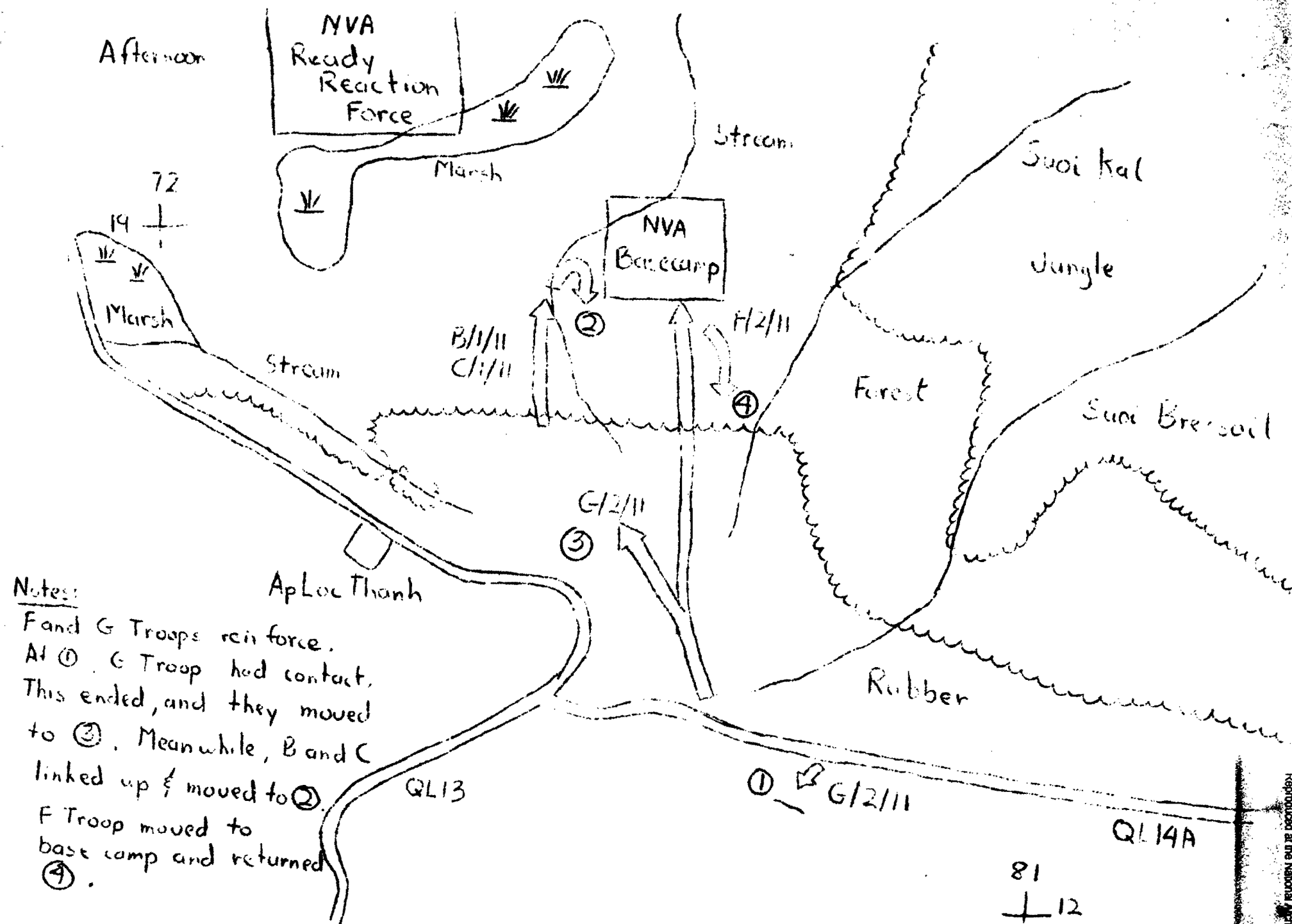
Five Support was placed in the areas as noted.

⑦ 6-12/11 received fire while moving to reinforce.

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Notes:

F and G Troops reinforce.
 At ①, G Troop had contact.
 This ended, and they moved
 to ③. Meanwhile, B and C
 linked up & moved to ②.
 F Troop moved to
 base camp and returned
 ④.

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ENCLOSURE I

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2-4 211600s PP II CC

1. (U) HQs, 11th Armd Cav Regt INTSUM NR 021-70.
2. (U) For the period: 210001H to 212400H Jan 70.
3. (C) Summary of Enemy Activity:

a. Ground Activity:

(1) 11th Armd Cav Regt (-), (OPCON to 1st Cav Div (AM)).

(a) 1st Sqdn (-), 11th ACR:

1. 210745H, XU760160, C/1/11th ACR; in etc, req LFT and Blue Max, rec'd s/a, mtr, RPG, and .51cal fire. Rtn w/org wpns. (ENIRF) (SC/O/O/D)

2. 210919H, XU745168, B/1/11th ACR; in etc w/USEF, rtn fire w/org wpns. Arty and LFT spt'd. (ENIRF) (SC/O/O/D)

3. 211142H, S3; rpt'd C Trp 1xUS KIA, 9xUS WIA, 2xM551 CBL, 2xM113 CBL. (ENIRF) (SC/O/O/D)

4. 211300H, vic XU760160, 1/11th ACR; fd map, indicates an enemy CP located in area w/trace: XU775183, XU778187, XU765193, XU776190, XU770194, XU776184, XU768177. There is a reaction force located in area bounded by XU7320, XU7322, XU7520, XU7522. Map also indicated mtr and AA pns in area.

5. 212000H, 1/11th ACR; final tally reported to be 31xNVA KIA. This is a combined count for 1/11 & 3/11. Ele wpns, doc's and ammo collection are as in Para 4e & ANNEX B this INTSUM.

(b) 2nd Sqdn (+), 11th ACR:

1. 210640H, XU928266, H/2/11th ACR; rec'd 8xrds mtr fire. Arty, LFT spt'd. Neg cas/unk. (ENIRF) (SC/O/O/D)

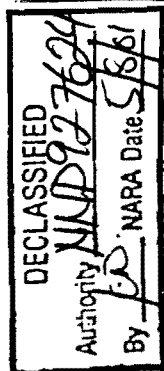
2. 210914H, XU879186, G/2/11th ACR; on way to 1/11th etc reported est Co size unit moved south through PSB EUNICE, sandal prints in road. (FRI) (SC/O/O/D)

3. 211033H, XU792145, G/2/11th ACR; rec'd s/a and RPG fire fm N side of road. Rtn'd fire w/org wpns. Neg cas/unk. (ENIRF) (SC/O/O/D)

4. 211608H, XU775150, 2/11th; G-F Trps in area of 1/11th etc.

5. 211625H, XU785130, G/2/11th ACR; in etc w/USEF, rec'd s/a and mtr fire fm S. Eng'd w/Arty, org wpns, LFT. Neg cas/unk.

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6. 212200H, S-2 2/11th ACR; rept'd 4xNVA KIA in etc today, cap't wpns and ref to para 4e and ANNEX B.

ANNEX B (Document Readout) to 11th ACR Intsum 021-70, dated 21 January 1970.

DOCUMENT BATCH NUMBER 01/012/70

(C) CAPTURE DATA: UNIT: C/1/11th ACR
DTG: 171400 January 1970
POC: XT580829

CIRCUMSTANCES: Found in bunker during contact.

(C) This batch of documents, which identified the K2 Battalion, 141st NVA Regiment and possibly the K4 Battalion, 165th NVA Regiment and the K1 Battalion, 141st NVA Regiment, contained the following:

(1) An envelope addressed to Nguyen Duc Hien, NVN from Nguyen Son Vy, LBN HT 86.532 1K B2 X7, (OB: LBN HT 86.532 YK B2 X7 identifies the B2 Platoon, C7 Company, K2 Battalion, 141st NVA Regiment.)

(2) A hand drawn 1:50,000 map of Loc Ninh.

(3) A 1942 edition of 1:100,000 map of An Loc and Loc Ninh.

(4) An undated sketch (not drawn to scale) of a battalion defensive position with the following instructions:

- If the enemy approaches position 1, one platoon of X2 will defend and AA will reinforce. X5 will fire mortars.

- If enemy approaches X2, X1 will defend with one platoon, X5 will fire mortars.

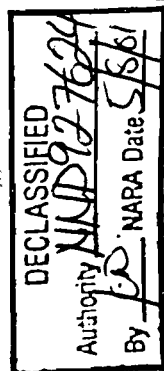
If the enemy approaches X5, one platoon of X2 and X3 will defend.

- If enemy approaches X3, X1 and X5 will defend.

- The AA must shoot down all helicopters in the area. X5 will fire their mortars.

- The mortars already have the ranges for every X unit.

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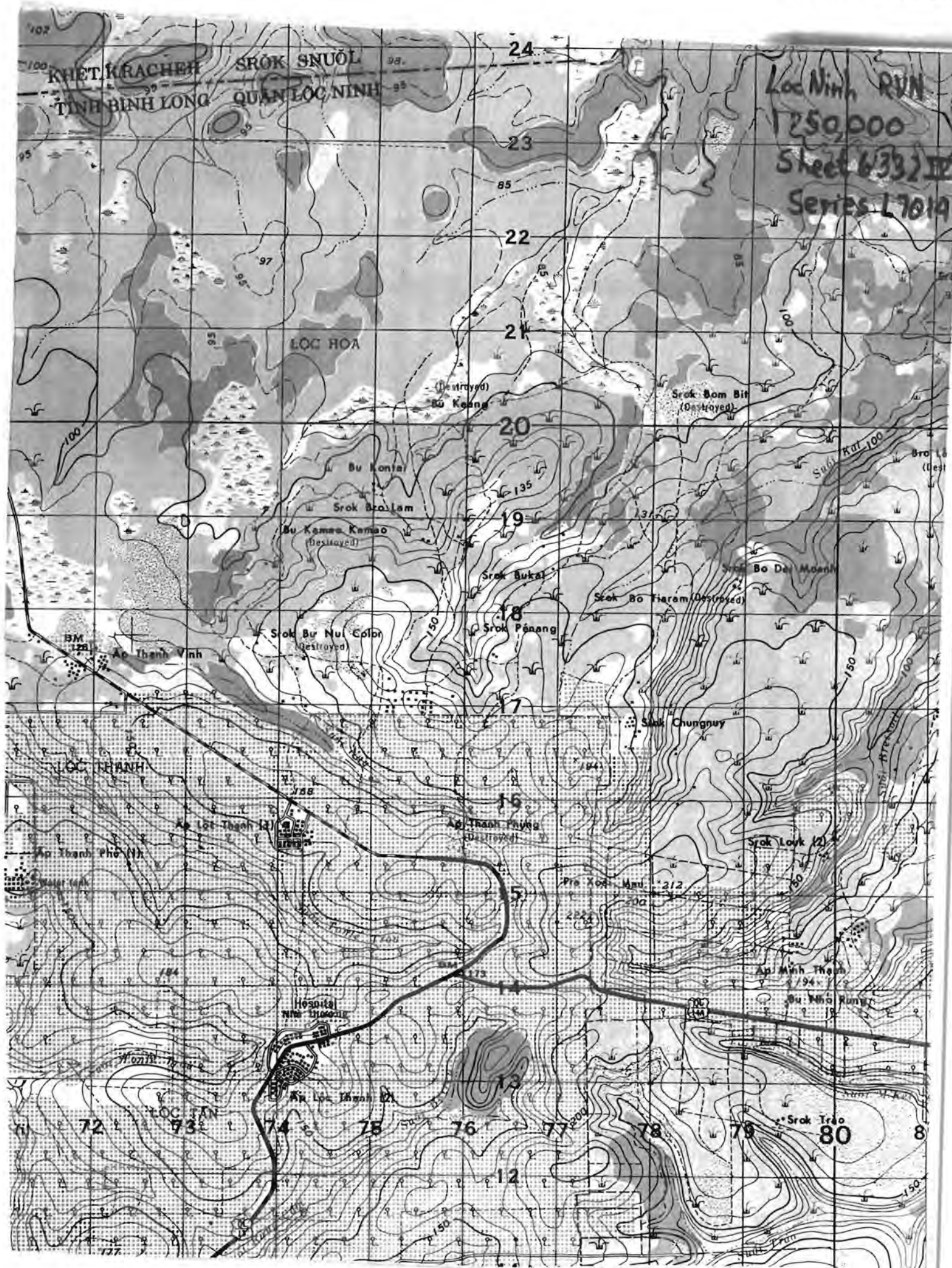
(6) A list of weapons and equipment belonging to Z1 (possible K1 Battalion, 141st NVA Regiment):

UNIT	CKC	AK	K54	B40	75mm RR	HMG	AT MINE	HG	TP	SHOVEL
K22	1	6		1/4	1/10			17	5	15
C2/K24		21	3	2/10		4/2000	2	35	25	42
C22	1	2								6

UNIT	SAW	HOE	MACHETTE
K22	1	4	1
C2/K24	4	5	4
C22	1		6

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