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

AVIG-WE

9 April 1970

SUBJECT: Combat After Action Interview Report

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

1. TYPE OF OPERATION: L Troop, 3/11th ACR, OPCON to the Third Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division (AM), conducted a reconnaissance operation.

2. DATE OF BATTLE: 10 March 1970.

3. LOCATION: Area west of LOC NINH, BINH LONG Province, Reference Map Series L7014, Map Sheet 6332 IV, Republic of Vietnam. (XU 681085).

4. TASK ORGANIZATION: L Troop, 3/11th ACR was supplemented with one five man "tracker" team from the 1st ACD. Support was provided by TAC Air and light fire teams.

5. MISSION: The First Platoon, L/3/11th ACR was to check their previous night's ambush site and reconnoiter the immediate area. The Second Platoon was to conduct a reconnaissance of the area northwest of the First Platoon. Second Platoon was joined by trackers who helped the Platoon follow an enemy trail to the northwest. The Third Platoon was to secure the Troop NDP.

6. CONCEPT OF OPERATION:

a. Background: On 9 March, while on a reconnaissance of the area east of PHNOM TIEM PRING (2) near XU 675090, the Second Platoon discovered a trail that had been used recently by enemy soldiers. It wound to the southeast and into the rubber plantations that surround LOC NINH.

Acting on this discovery, the Troop prepared an automatic ambush consisting of trip wires, flares, and claymore mines along the trail. This type of ambush had been very effective recently and CPT Caldwell, the Troop Commander, hoped that it would work again.

About 1930 hours the ambush "popped". L Troop's mortar section quickly fired forty rounds into the area and then continued to fire sporadically throughout the night. Early the next morning the First Platoon moved to the ambush site.

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They found one dead NVA soldier, one AK-47, and some equipment. The ground was covered with sandal prints leading into the nearby rubber. For the rest of the day, Second Platoon would follow this trail to the northwest, First Platoon would reconnoiter the rubber to the southeast, and Third Platoon would secure the NDP. (See sketch 1)

b. Execution: The radio crackled momentarily and then was silent again. First Lieutenant Eric C. Spanier, First Platoon Leader, had just radioed to his Commander, Captain John S. Caldwell, telling him that many Vietnamese rubber workers were near-by.¹ The platoon leader was leading half his men on foot—a dismounted patrol. Behind this small party, rumbled the AAV's and Sheridans of his platoon, with only the drivers' and track commanders' positions manned. The platoon moved forward slowly through the rows of towering rubber trees. Their mission was to find any enemy mines.

Less than a kilometer to the northwest, the Second Platoon was securing a team of trackers from the 1st ACD.² They were following a footpath that ran northwest-southeast through the jungle to the rubber where the First Platoon was operating. Their progress was slow but steady. The dogs and men of the tracking team studied the terrain carefully—discovering the clues and signs of enemy presence.

In the rubber, the First Platoon troopers had seen nothing but rubber workers. The dismounted element walked 40 meters ahead of the tracks. The day seemed quiet. Then... a shot! Some men in the dismounted group had seen and engaged an enemy soldier immediately to their front. In a split second the quiet calm gave way to the sounds of exploding shells, RPG's, and small-arms fire.

1LT Spanier and his men hit the dirt and returned the fire. In front of them the enemy had erupted with a fusilade of small-arms and RPG's.³ In the rear, 1LT Spanier could see his tracked vehicles receiving fire, but he knew that their return fire was limited because of his dismounted men. His radio was not working and he could not communicate with CPT Caldwell who had just arrived from the Second Platoon.

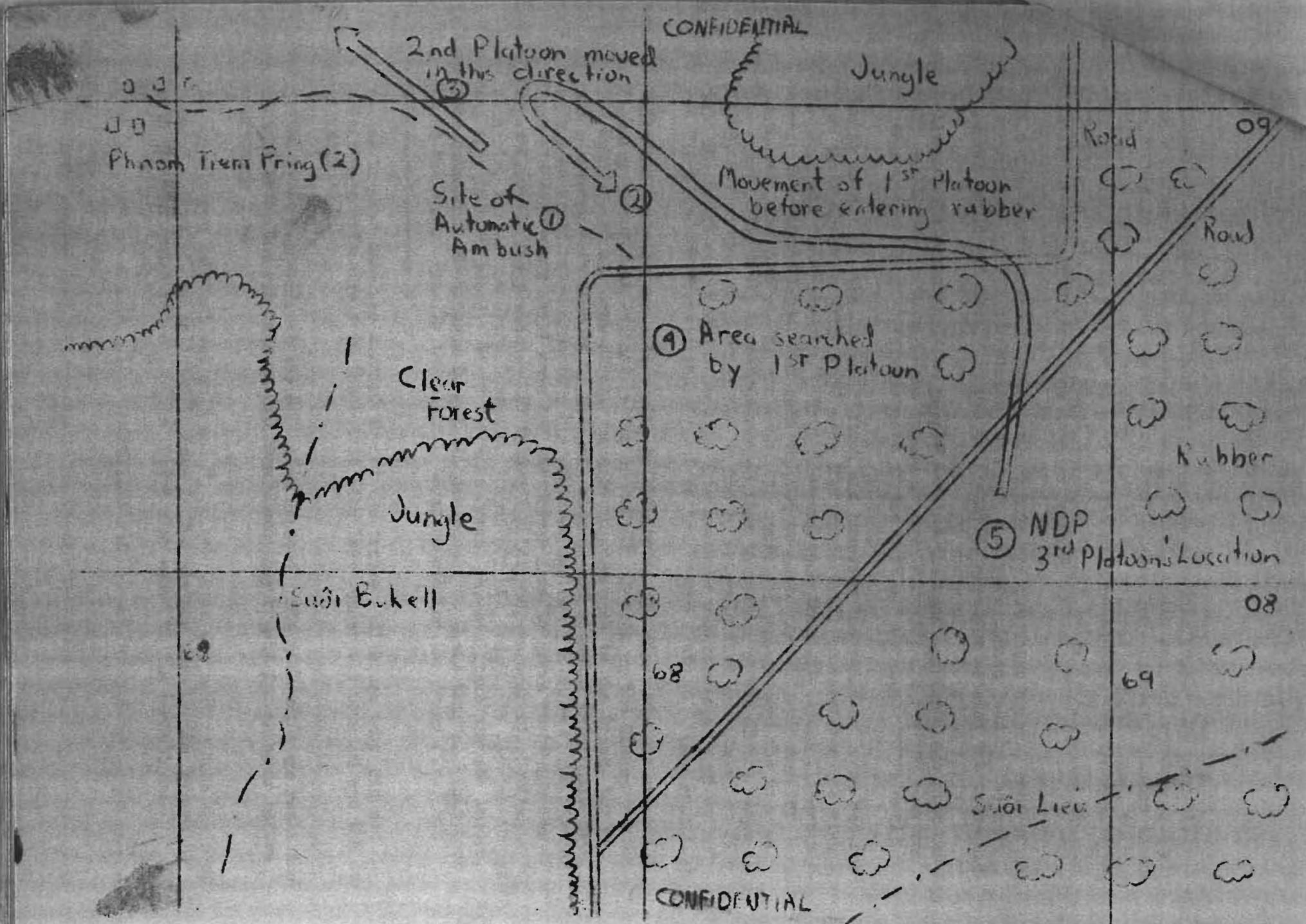
The Troop Commander quickly realized that maneuvering the tracks to rescue the

1. They gave no indication of the NVA, and although they remained near the fighting, they were not hurt.
2. In the morning, the sandal tracks were found, CPT Caldwell called for a tracker team from 1st ACD, consisting of five men and a dog. The team flew in by helicopter at 0900 hours. That team followed the enemy trail while the Second Platoon followed them for security.
3. The enemy positions covered a large area (400 meters north to south, and 200 meters east to west).

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dismounted men and assaulting the enemy was the only hope. CPT Caldwell had to communicate to accomplish this, but his radio was not working properly. One of his rear gunners, Specialist Fourth Class Tony Herbert, jumped to the ground and raced through the enemy fire to the platoon's right flank, telling the drivers to push forward to pick up the dismounted men. At the same time, CPT Caldwell had his driver wheel his ACAV to the left, rallying the men on the left flank and urging them to move forward.

While the tracks tried to move forward to carry out these orders, some of the dismounted men tried to retreat, but many men were pinned down by the enemy fire and could not move. It was difficult to maneuver because the troop did not have fire superiority at this time—the enemy was close and firing heavy volleys. The tracks had few people manning the guns and the dismounted men had only small arms. "Getting the tracks to move forward, and getting everyone on them was the most difficult part of the battle," recalled CPT Caldwell.

During this time, the Second Platoon had answered the radio call and had sped from their location (XU667095) down the jungle trail to reinforce the right flank of the first platoon.⁴ This movement took them only about fifteen minutes. The Third Platoon had been ordered to leave the NDP and maneuver southwest, down the valley and then turn north and push toward the rear of the enemy. The Troop Commander warned them to remain on top of the ridge into (XU683080) so that they would not be hit by friendly fire and would not fire into the First and Second Platoon. This movement was completed rapidly and the Third Platoon arrived shortly before the Second Platoon.⁵ (See sketch 2)

While the two platoons were coming to reinforce, the First Platoon was still fighting desperately against bitter opposition to pick up the dismounted men. 1LT Spanier and his crew finally managed to edge back to the track, but he and a crewman were wounded by shrapnel from an RPG slamming into their track before he could begin directing his vehicles against the enemy. The Platoon Leader's ACAV could still move and the driver finally drove it behind the right flank of the platoon. CPT Caldwell quickly drove over to coordinate with him, but as the Troop Commander jumped off his track, the Lieutenant passed out from loss of blood. Staff Sergeant Brown, the assistant platoon leader, took command.⁶ He managed to get all his people to their tracks. This took about one hour. Finally the platoon began countering the enemy fire, but

4. The tracker team was carried aboard the tracks. Although they did not participate extensively in the battle, the team leader was wounded and the dog killed.

5. The First Sergeant, at the NDP, also reacted. His ACAV tried to reach the contact area, but ran into an RPG team which they fought for an hour before overcoming them.

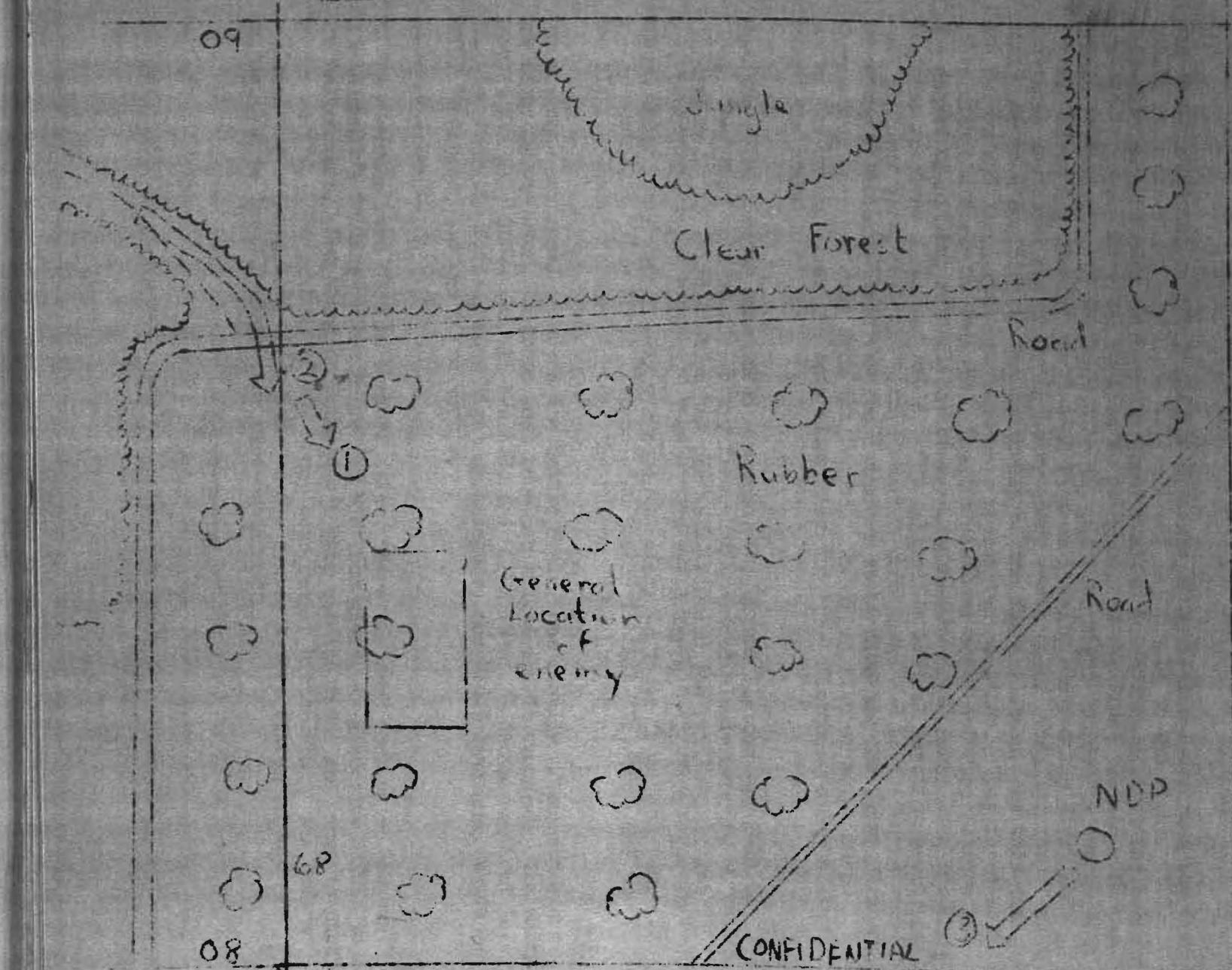
6. The Platoon Sergeant was on R and R, so SSG Brown was next in the chain of command. Most of the enlisted leaders in the platoon were on the ground with the dismounted patrol. This factor also added to the confusion.

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Sketch 2



Note:

① 1st Platoon was reconnoitering here when contact began

② 2nd Platoon re-entered area from the south

③ 3rd Platoon moved from NDD to the southwest

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throughout the contact they were not as effective as the other platoons and moved little.

In the meantime, besides maneuvering his troop, CPT Caldwell had called for Medevacs and air support. The TAC Air jets and light fire teams arrived within 15 to 30 minutes after the battle began, and were on station during the remainder of the battle. They bombarded the whole western edge of the rubber 7 and concentrated on the old bunkers that ran along the hill slope at XU677080. (See sketch 3)

The Second Platoon, on the right flank of the First Platoon, overcame the fire coming from the enemy positions to the front and jungle to the right. CPT Caldwell had them move through the First Platoon to advance against the bunkers, instead of approaching the bunkers by going around the First Platoon. He was afraid if they went to the side, the two platoons might accidentally engage each other. Advancing slowly, the Second Platoon finally cleared the First and continued southeast encountering heavy enemy resistance. Finally, they fought their way to a position to the northwest of the Third Platoon. By this time, the Second and Third Platoons were in a precarious position. They faced each other with the enemy in between. The two platoons could not fire because of the danger of hitting friendlies; however, the enemy could fire. The two platoons received a hail of RPG's. CPT Caldwell's initial reaction was to pull both platoons back, mark the enemy location with smoke and have a Cobra strafe the enemy positions. This was too dangerous so he directed the Third Platoon to maneuver east and away from the Second. The Third Platoon swept north around the contact area and came along side the First Platoon--facing south toward the enemy.

When the Third Platoon maneuvered eastward, the Second Platoon was able to fire. They kept up a steady, heavy fire, but advanced slowly because of the counterfire. The Third Platoon had partially circled the battlefield and were behind the First Platoon. They slowly moved through the First and continued their heavy fire. They overcame the enemy to their front and turned to the northeast. The First Platoon also turned in this direction and the two platoons swept forward through the rubber. (See sketch 4)

The platoons continued to sweep the battle field, but finally after six hours the fighting was over. L Troop lost four men killed and 16 wounded. The enemy lost 47 NVA KIA, 6 NVA KRA, 35 NVA KEP, and 6 NVA PW's. L Troop captured 14 AK-47's, four SKS rifles, four light machineguns, one RPG-7 launcher, three RPG-2 launchers, and one 60 mm mortar.

7. The Medevacs were slow in coming. Also, there was some confusion because CPT Caldwell's failing radio prevented him from giving an accurate SITREP to the helicopters. The Squadron Commander's ship was the first one down to pick up dust-off's. The members of the Troop were rather bitter about the Medevac helicopter's seeming lack of action. A few troopers were driven around the battlefield to the NDP where they were dusted off.

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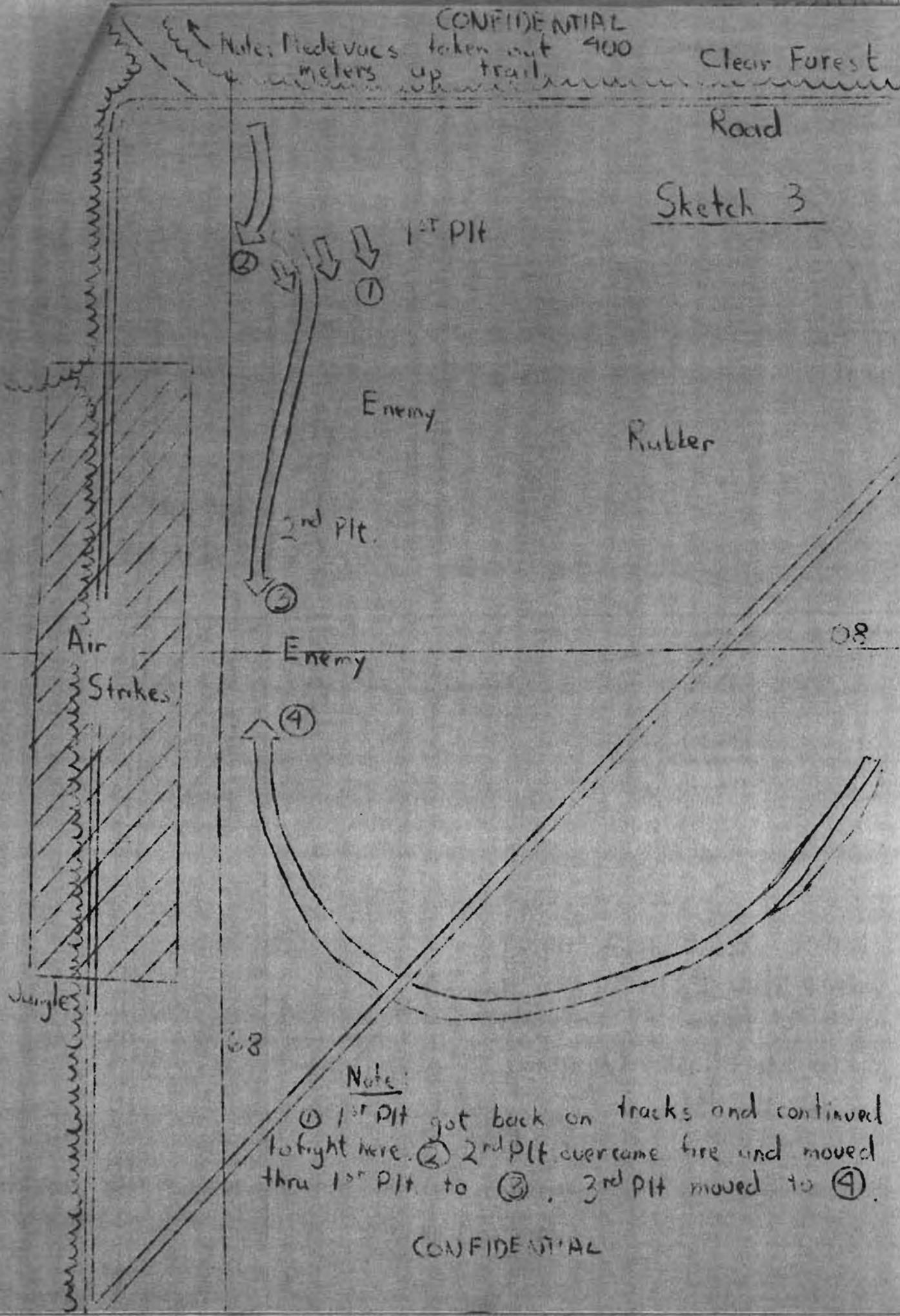
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Note: Pictures taken out 400 meters up trail. Clear Forest

Clear Forest

Road

Sketch 3



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Forest

Sketch 4

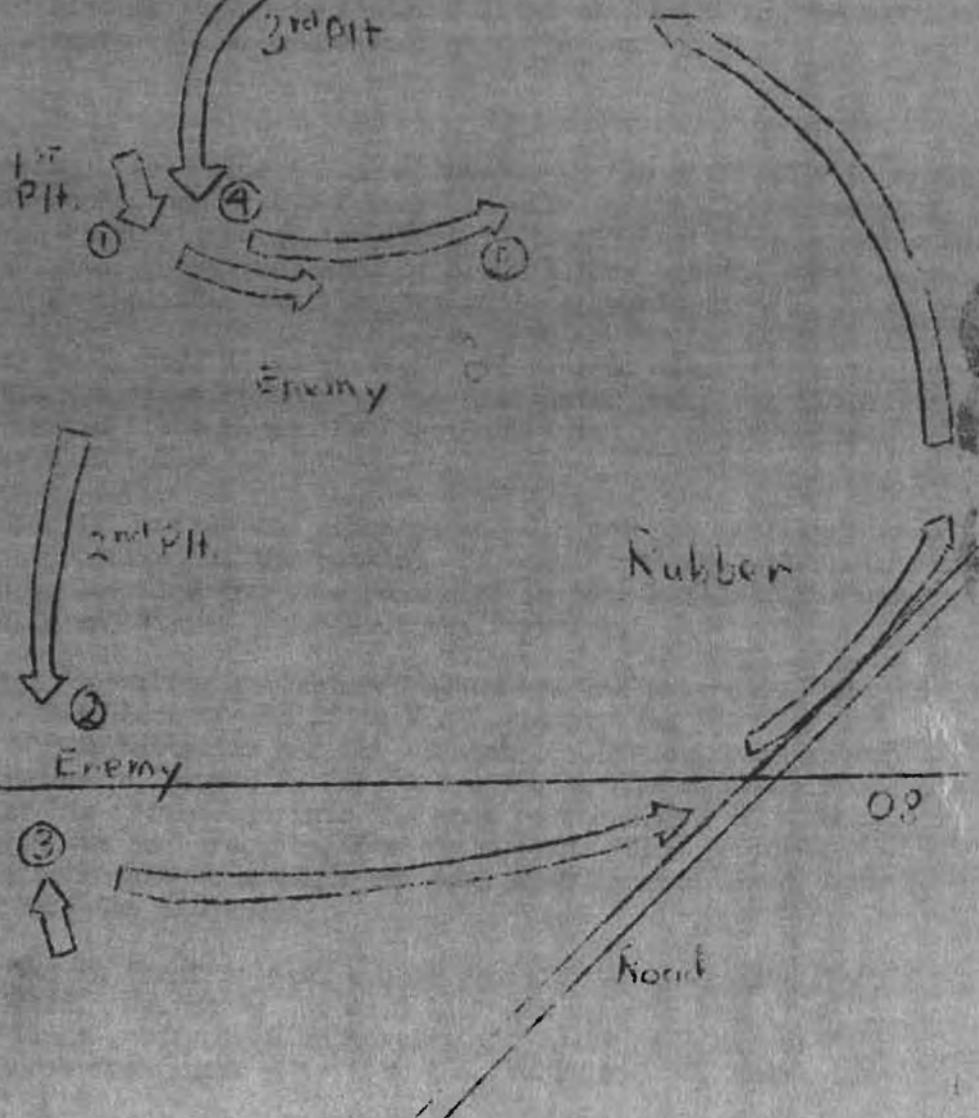
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Forest

Air
Strike

Jungle

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Note

① 1st Plt fought here. ② 2nd Plt faced 3rd Plt at ③ with enemy in between. 3rd moved to ④ and 2nd continued to fight at ②. Finally 3rd and 1st Plt moved ahead to ⑤.

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That night, the Third Platoon stayed in a strong Point at XU680093. The next day, Second Platoon occupied the area and continued the search.

7. COMMENTS:

a. Friendly actions: According to CPT Caldwell, he had difficulty in three areas: getting the First Platoon tracks forward to pick up the dismounted men; maneuvering the Second Platoon through the First Platoon's position; maneuvering the Second and Third Platoon away from each other when they had the enemy in between. (These were accomplished despite poor radio communication.)

The fire and maneuver were good. Although the First Platoon dismount initially was caught between the two fires, nobody in the dismounted group was hit by friendly fires. After the first hour, the fight consisted of maneuvering--all of which was done skillfully.

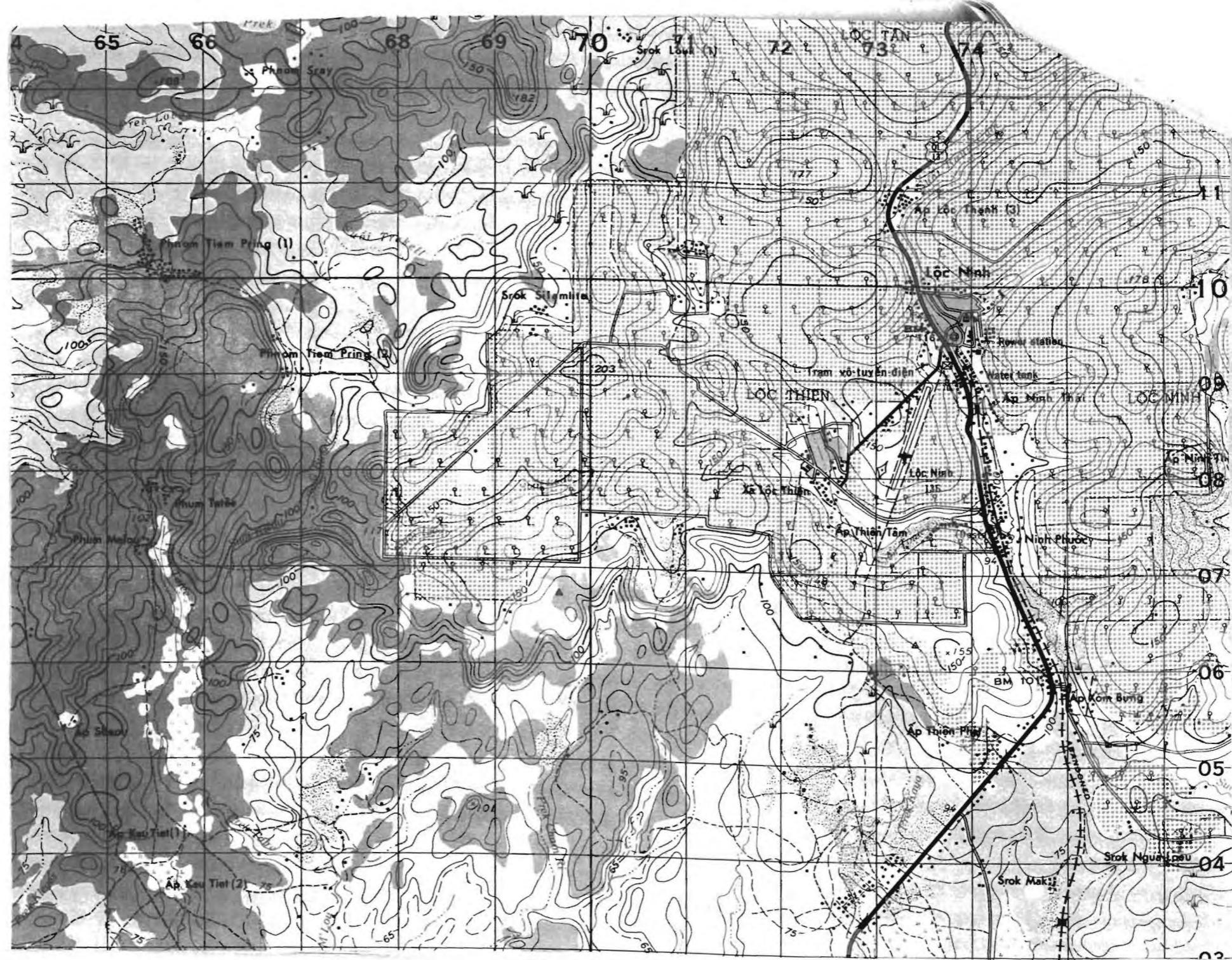
CPT Caldwell only used Air Strikes and gunships and did not use artillery or mortars during the main portion of the battle. He considered that the artillery and mortar use would be too slow and time consuming in this battle. The air support arrived quickly and stayed throughout the fighting.

b. Enemy actions: According to captured documents and prisoners, the enemy unit was the K7 Battalion of the 209th NVA Regiment, 7th NVA Division. The three companies of the battalion had the mission of conducting an ambush near XU676075. One prisoner, Nguyen Ba Hop, who was with one of these companies, C-4 Company, said that his unit moved into the area on the night of 8 March and began digging positions and preparing for the ambush. Upon completion of the ambush, they were to return to a temporary base camp located about three hours to the west of Mang Cai (XU695095).

The units emplaced mines in front of each ambush position as well as a few along an unspecified road. Nguyen Ba Hop said that his company had four B-40 and B-41 rocket launchers, one 60 mm mortar, and AK-47 rifles. (Note: The information was taken from Annex A to 11th ACR INTSUM 069-70, dated 10 March 70.)

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