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

AVIC-WE

2 March 1970

SUBJECT: Combat After Action Interview Report

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

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

1. NAME AND TYPE OF OPERATION: Combined infantry - armor reconnaissance of suspected enemy positions.
2. DATE: 14 February 1970.
3. LOCATION: Reference Map Series L7014, Sheet Number 6231 IV, Tay Ninh sheet of Tay Ninh Province, Republic of Vietnam.
4. PERSONS BEING INTERVIEWED: Lieutenant Colonel James Reed, First Squadron Commander, 11th ACR; Captain George E. Patch, Commander of C Troop, 11th ACR; Staff Sergeant Joseph Mabe, acting platoon sergeant of C Troop, 11th ACR; Specialist Four Max Cevera, door gunner, 11th ACR.
5. TASK ORGANIZATION: C Troop, First Squadron, 11th ACR; First Platoon of M Company (tank), 3/11th ACR; and C Company, Second of the Eighth Cavalry, First Cavalry Division (AM).
6. SUPPORTING FORCES: None were used during the main contact, but afterward, light fire teams, artillery, Blue Max, and air strikes were utilized.
7. BACKGROUND INFORMATION: During the entire month of February, A and C Troops, 1/11th ACR, and a platoon of tanks from M Company of the 11th ACR had been under the operational control of 2-8th Cav. The task force (TF 2-8) had

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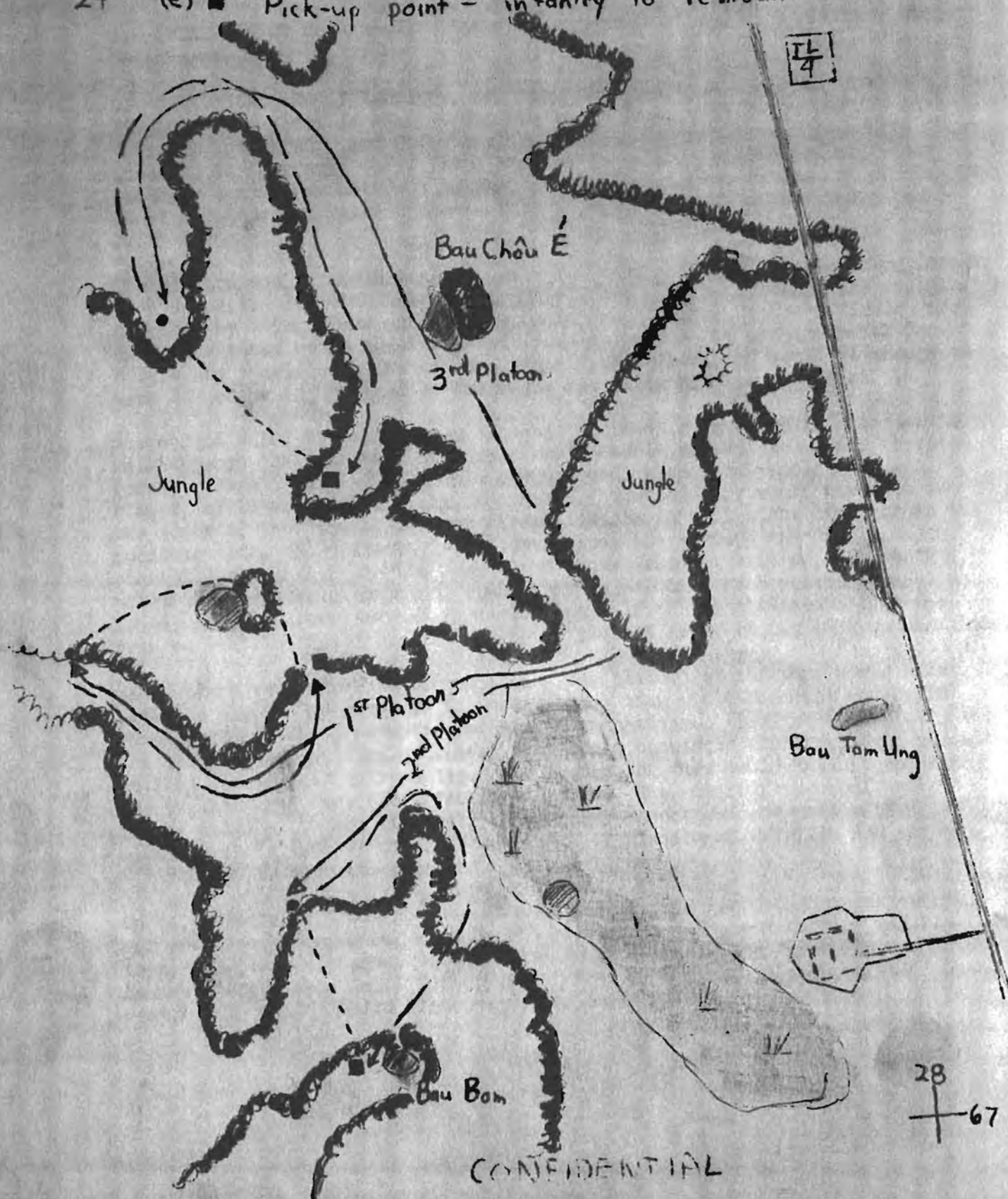
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Mission of C/1/11th ACR and C/2-8 Cav (CONFIDENTIAL)

- (a) — Indicates movement into area with infantry mounted
- (b) • Drop point where infantry dismounted
- 73(c) --- Infantry platoon movement (dismounted)
- (d) — Armored Cav. Platoon movement
- 24 (e) ■ Pick-up point - infantry to remount tracks.



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conducted extensive reconnaissance and Rome Flow operations in War Zone C to interdict infiltrating enemy forces and to disrupt the enemy lines of communication.

8. INTERVIEWING SPECIALIST: Enlisted personnel of the 28th Military History Detachment.

9. EXECUTION: On 13 February, reports indicated that XT248706, XT237698, and XT251679 were possible enemy troop concentrations. The 2-8th Command gave C Troop, 1/11th ACR, and C Company, 2-8th Cav, the mission of reconning these areas on 14 February. (CPT Patch and the infantry captain operated under a peculiar command structure. Neither captain was placed in command of the combined infantry and armor forces-- they were to command jointly under the 2-8th Command.

The mission was rather difficult, even for combined armor and infantry forces. Each suspected location was in extremely dense jungle. These areas could be reconned by using armor exclusively, only infantry, or both. If armor were used, the tanks would have to "bust" jungle, because it was too thick for ACAV's and Sheridans. The noise of this "jungle busting" would be enough to warn any enemy in the area of our plans and allow him time to react.

Instead of using armor, the two commands decided to have the infantry platoons walk through these areas. The armor would remain merely as a ready reaction force. (Note: This was possible because each suspected jungle area was ringed, at least partially, by open areas.) The infantry would dismount on the edges of the jungle, conduct reconnaissance in a straight line across the possible site, and continue in the same direction through the jungle to another cleared area where the ACAV's and tanks would be waiting. The ACAV's, after the infantry dismounted, would stay in position as a possible reaction force until the infantry had proceeded one-half of the distance. Then the armored vehicles would speed through the cleared areas to the link-up positions.

Since there were three suspected areas, one platoon of infantry would ride with one platoon of armor to the area, where they would dismount and begin reconning. If the dismounted infantry reconnaissance resulted in contact, the armor forces had two options: they could penetrate the jungle and assault on line with the infantry between the tracks, or they could assault opposite the infantry and have the infantry withdraw. The entire force could react to any platoon contact since all three enemy concentrations were within an eight square kilometer area. (See sketch of mission of C/1/11th ACR and C/2-8th Cav on opposite page.)

On 14 February, C Troop moved west near the 70 grid line, each track carrying six or seven infantrymen. The Second Platoon of C Troop (carrying 2nd Platoon, C/2-8th Cav) turned to the southern-most area. The First Platoon and Headquarters element of C Troop, with C Company's First Platoon, turned southwest. Both units' Third Platoons turned north.

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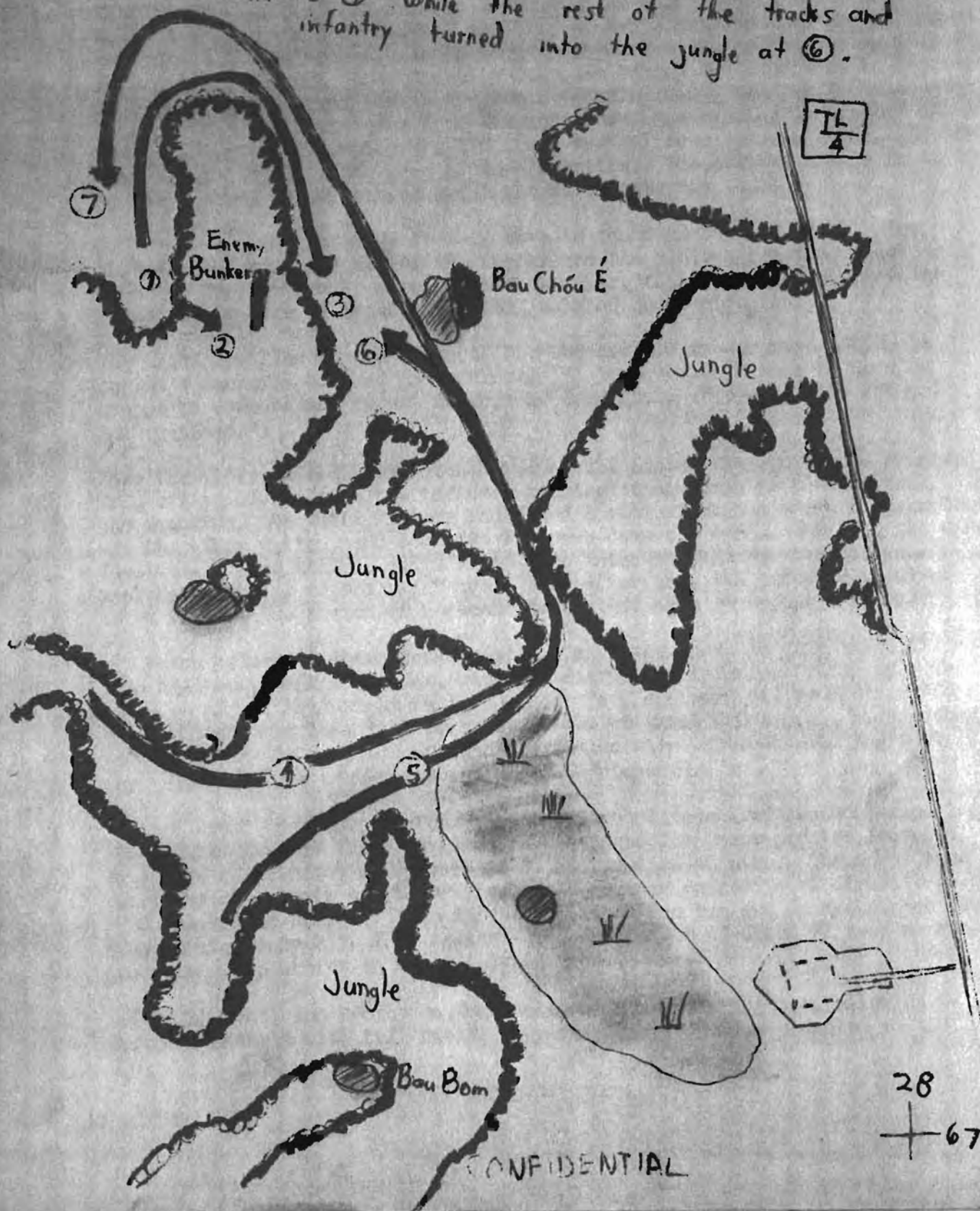
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Sketch 2: (Movement to Contact Area) ① The infantry dismounted. They began moving southeast and made contact at ②. Meanwhile, the tracks had moved to ③ where they made contact. ④ First Platoon reacted. ⑤ Second Platoon also reacted. They both joined Third Platoon in contact at ⑥. CPT Patch sent Second Platoon around to ⑦ while the rest of the tracks and infantry turned into the jungle at ⑥.



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The survey area assigned to the Third Platoon lay in the center of an elliptical-shaped jungle jutting into a two kilometer wide clearing. The infantry would dismount at the northern point of the narrowest radius; they would be picked up at the southern point.

The Third Platoon of C/2-8th Cav dismounted at 1230 hours. The tracks waited until the infantry had reconnoitered one-half of the area; then the tracks travelled the jungle circumference. Two M Company tanks led the column southwest. Staff Sergeant Mabe, track commander of a Sheridan behind the lead tank in the right file, saw an RPG round pass between his vehicle (C-37) and the A-6 element behind him. The round came from the northwest, and eventually bounced off a tree. It was 1415 hours. The RPG round was followed by more RPG's, and mortar fire to the left and rear of the formation. The column, almost in sight of the pick-up point, turned right and fired into the jungle.

CPT Patch and the infantry captain were in the Headquarters track. The infantrymen scrambled aboard the tracks and the platoon reacted. The Second Platoon, further south, also reacted; however, their distance was greater. 2-8th Cavalry was notified and sent a command and control ship.

LTC Reed also flew to the contact, but because his troops were OPCON, he couldn't exercise command and control. "I just couldn't bear to have my troops in contact and me not there," he commented. "It was their show; I just watched."

When the Troop united, CPT Patch directed the Second Platoon to the original drop-off point, in case the infantry retraced their path in a withdrawal. In the meantime, the Third Platoon had found a communications wire and promptly cut it. They waited, and soon two NVA came down the trail, checking the wire. The two NVA were killed, and a short time later another NVA was killed--probably checking on the first two. Soon afterward, the infantry received heavy fire. (See sketch of movement to contact area on opposite page.)

CPT Patch ordered a three tank "bust", i.e. three tanks leading three files into the enemy bunker complex, with the dismounted infantry following. Two vehicles made a half-right as they penetrated, and were hit by RPG's. "Both the right and the left tank were hit by two or three RPG's...hit high...they were aimed at the people. One man was killed then, another died the next day. Two or three men were wounded," SSG Mabe said.

But the armor advanced, firing. The infantry platoon (9th Platoon) reported .50 caliber fire at their position. When asked for their precise location, they gave coordinates which were in C Troop's line of fire. There was some confusion over their exact location, because they seemed to be directly behind the bunker complex. The infantry platoon had run out of smoke grenades--they carried only 21. (See sketch 3 of enlargement of Third Platoon's movement and troop action on the following page.)

CPT Patch asked the 2-8th Cav Command to withdraw the platoon, allowing C Troop to assault with full fields of fire. His request was denied on the

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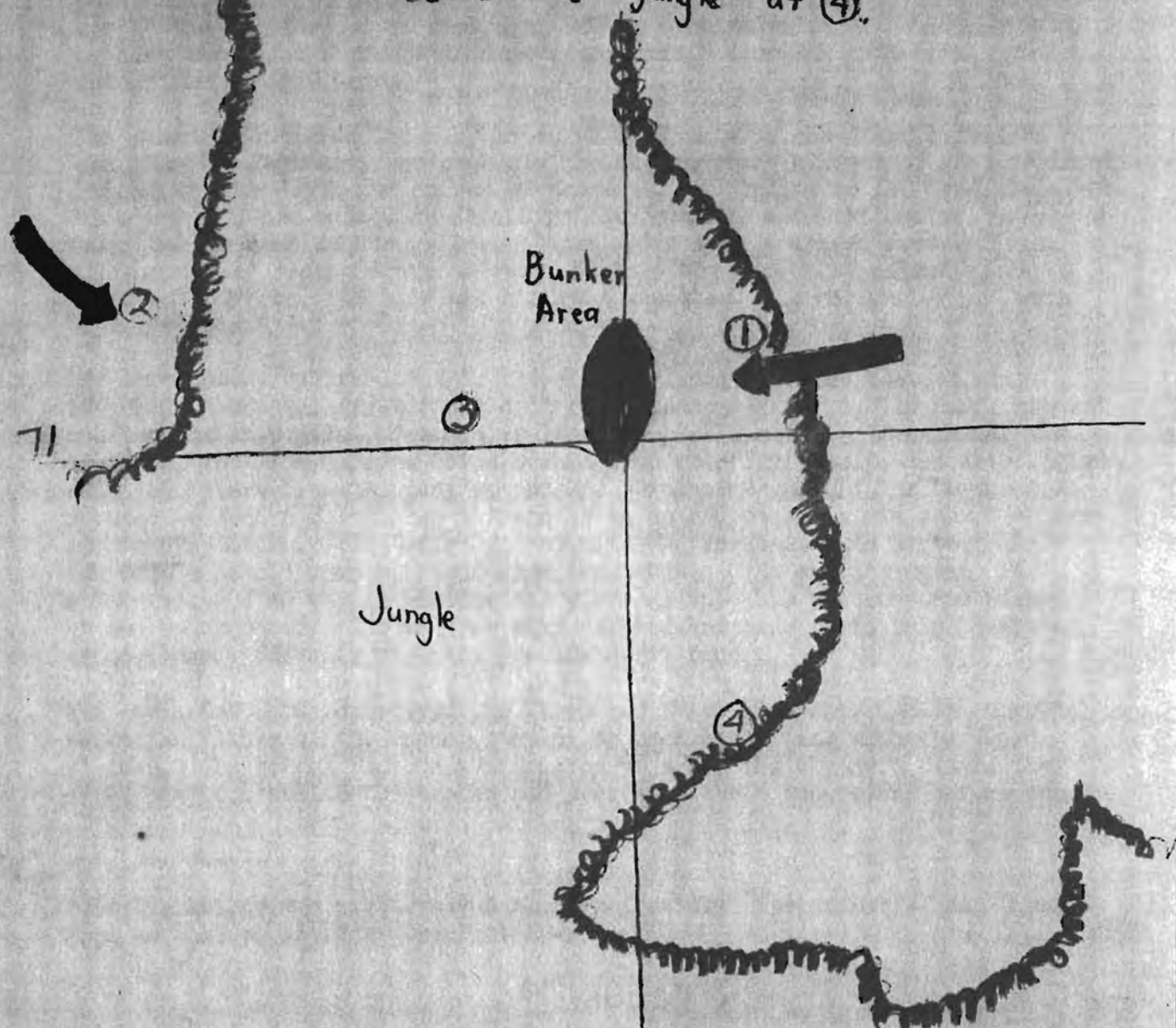
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Sketch 3: Action near bunker complex.

- ① Armor-Infantry team entered in this direction..
- ② Second Platoon remained here.
- ③ The 3rd Plt., C/2-8 Cav. came under fire here. They lost communication but finally came out of the jungle at ④.




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grounds that the platoon could act as a blocking force. CPT Patch again requested the platoon's withdrawal; he was again refused. The Third Platoon, C/2-8th Cav, subsequently lost radio communication. Thus, their position could not be determined.

Because radio communication had been lost, neither artillery nor gunships could be used. The infantry position was unknown; the armor could not assault and was told to cease fire.

The troopers, meanwhile, were taking RPG, .51 caliber and .30 caliber machinegun, and small arms fire. The fire was heavy, although many RPG's bounced off trees harmlessly in the dense jungle. Some near misses prompted the troopers to return fire. "CPT Patch spent a frustrating afternoon telling men not to fire," remarked LTC Reed. To return fire is almost instinctive to armored personnel; the return fire did not indicate a lack or loss of discipline, simply the nearness of an exploding RPG or machinegun fire. "...didn't do no harm though, the grunts told me afterwards," commented SSG Mabe, on the return firing of C Troop.

The enemy, identified later by captured documents as the Third Battalion of the 272nd VC Regiment, was probably the headquarters element of that regiment, judging by the depth and amount of armament. According to LTC Reed, this contact probably pre-empted an attack on FSB Barbara, a few kilometers away. The enemy bunker complex was well concealed, with good overhead cover, firing slits and rear escape doors.¹ "Those bunkers had beautiful camouflage," lamented SSG Mabe, "Charlie had his shit together. It was one of the worst days I've had."

MAJ Abrahamson, 1/11th ACR S-3, alternated flying over the contact with LTC Reed. When the first radio call for a medivac came in, 1LT Huff, command and control ship pilot, decided to land and pick them up. (Because of the distance, Tay Ninh medivac ships have a slow reaction time.) The ship landed about 50 meters from the jungle, and MAJ Abrahamson and SP4 Max Cervera dismounted to load a Blackhorse Trooper "with an RPG round in his back," according to SP4 Cervera. SP4 Cervera stayed with MAJ Abrahamson to protect him. "He didn't have a weapon," explained SP4 Cervera. (He probably meant MAJ Abrahamson had no weapon besides his pistol.) The ship returned and picked up two wounded men. The medivac ship arrived and made three trips carrying wounded men. One ship reported ground-to-air fire.

The 2-8th Cav Command ordered the First and Third Platoons, C/2-8th Cav, to sweep the flanks of the bunker complex to locate and link with the Third Platoon. The Second Platoon was ordered to sweep the southern flank; they moved out from behind the tracks and proceeded about ten meters before enemy

¹The Blackhorse has previously mauled various elements of the 272nd VC Regiment in battles in Binh Long Province.

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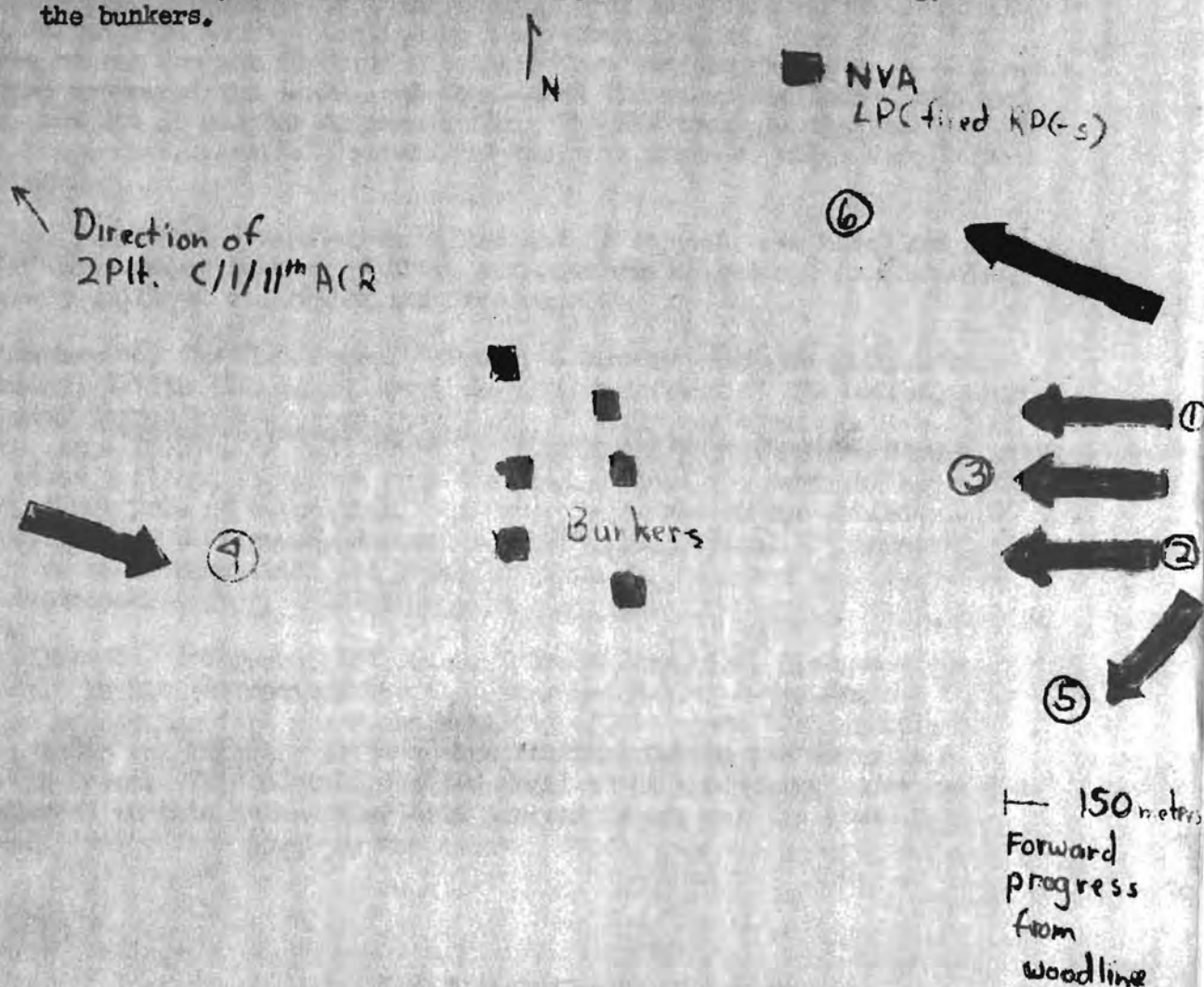
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Sketch: Tactical movement into complex.

The units advanced in three files with tanks (3 tanks from 1st Platoon, M Company, 11th ACR. The other tanks of the 1st Platoon were with 2nd Platoon, C/1/11th ACR) in the lead, busting jungle. At (1) and (2) locations, the lead tanks of the outer files were hit with RPGs fired from the NVA LP. Sheridans took their places and the advanced continued to (3) where the fire was heavy. At this time 3rd Plt of C Company, 2-8th radioed that they were getting friendly fire and gave their location as (4). Effective commo was lost at this time, so C Troop's First and Third Platoon held their fire. The infantry platoon which had been walking to the rear of the armor now moved out to link-up with their "lost" platoon. One infantry platoon was pinned down almost immediately at (5). The other one went a little farther, but was pinned down after moving about 40-50 meters to (6). The contact stayed like this for some time, but finally the lost platoon (2nd Plt, C/2-8th) came out of the jungle to the southeast. At that time, Blue Max and Artillery, which had been waiting, bombarded the bunkers.



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fire halted their advance. The First Platoon was ordered to sweep the northern flank; they went forty or fifty meters before the enemy opened up with small-arms and machine gun fire that killed or wounded six infantry men. (See sketch 4: Tactical maneuver into the bunker area.)

About 1730 hours, the Third Platoon reached their southern pick-up point in the clearing. C Troop had penetrated 150 to 200 meters into the jungle, almost to the beginning of the bunker complex. The Troop withdrew to allow Blue Max, Apache Teams to work out over the area. Afterwards, Air Strikes and artillery were called in. The fires had to be carefully controlled, for the infantry unit had two men missing. During the night, CPT Patch kept mortar fires near the abandoned tanks to keep them from being stripped, but to no avail.

The next day, G Company swept the contact area and found an RPG round at XT248712 at 1330 hours. Continuing the reconnaissance, they found the bodies of the two men reported missing before and one dead NVA at 1800 hours. C Troop recovered the tanks--and found that the enemy had indeed stripped them, but not of weapons or ammunition. The NVA took all the beer and soda, magazines, personal letters and the tank manuals, which were later recovered.

The total casualties were seven killed and 27 wounded. An M48A3 and an M113A1 were combat losses. C Troop suffered one killed and four wounded. M Company suffered one killed and five wounded.

On February 16, the Task Force (C Troop; C Company; and one platoon from M Company, 3/11th ACR) again swept the area and found 11 NVA bodies, making the enemy losses by body count total 45. C Troop was credited with 17 of these. At XT251710, at 1235 hours, an M48 and a M551 Sheridan struck anti-tank mines emplaced 75 meters from the road. Since the vehicles had belly armor, there were no casualties, but moderate damage to the vehicles. C Company found 1 B-40 round, documents, 3 shovels, several NVA hammocks, 70 rounds of AK-47 ammunition and 3 Chicom grenades. All but the documents were destroyed.

10. COMMENTS: Afterward, CPT Patch, C Troop Commander, discussed the contact. In his estimation, the Commander and S-3 of 2-8th did not fully realize or use the fire power and mobility of his armor. An example of this was the one infantry platoon that remained behind the enemy as a blocking force. This platoon was too small to be a blocking force and did not succeed in this role--they only managed to prevent the armor from utilizing their fire power on the enemy. Continuing the reconnaissance, they found the bodies of the two men reported missing before and one dead NVA at 1800 hours. C Troop recovered the tanks--and found that the enemy had indeed stripped them, but not of weapons or ammunition. The NVA took all the beer and soda, magazines, personal letters and the tank manuals, which were later recovered.

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