

By YSW/Em

NARA, Date 8/4/87

CONVOY

AMBUSH

BLACKHORSE

REGIMENT

21 NOV 66

338/82/1515 14/15 2-12 Nov 66 Amb. Rep

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This is a study of an action in which the basic maneuver element of any Armored Cavalry unit - a platoon - was engaged. The study was directed at discovering just what the platoon did as it fought the Viet Cong and was not intended to pass judgement on the Modified TO&E under which the platoon was operating, or designed to cast aspersions on any of the participants.

Blackhorse Base Camp
Republic of Vietnam July 1967

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1. Introduction. This report has been prepared as a study of a platoon size action involving elements of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. A 1:50,000 map of the ambush area (Annex B) and the exact ambush location (Annex C) are included in this report to assist the reader in visualizing the terrain and disposition in the killing zone.

The report was prepared by a study of the publications listed in Annex A and personal interviews of officers and men involved in the action.

The narrative ends when the 1st Squadron reaction force arrived at the ambush site. At that time the platoon reverted to troop control and the small unit action became a squadron size operation.

Though there was no one individual timing the entire action, a sequence of events was established during the interview as follows:

1025H - Ambush initiated.

Approximately 1030H - Light Fire Team arrives and begins to attack.

Approximately 1039H - F100's conduct air strike.

Approximately 1045 - F5's conduct air strike.

Approximately 1100H - 1st Squadron reaction force begins to arrive.

2. Background Information.

a. General. Operation ATLANTA, which began on 20 October 1966, was the operation in which the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment cleared, secured and occupied a base camp, vicinity of Long Giao, YT 4496, 12 kilometers south of Suan Loc, RVN. The convoy of 21 November was one of the many convoys moving supplies, equipment and men from the staging area at Long Binh to base camp as Operation ATLANTA progressed.

The convoy was quite large, consisting of a minimum of 80 vehicles not counting the nine ACAV's in the escort platoon. Units that had vehicles in the convoy included Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 11th Armored Cavalry, 28th Military History Detachment, 33rd Chemical Detachment, 11th Armored Cavalry Tactical Air Control Party, 541st Military Intelligence Detachment, 48th Transportation Group, 6th Transportation Battalion, as well as elements of the S1, S3, and S4 staff sections of Headquarters, 11th Armored Cavalry.

b. Convoy Escort. The convoy escort consisted of nine ACAV's under the command of 1LT Neil L. Keltner, 05418251, a platoon leader in Troop C, 1st Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. The escort platoon was a composite unit consisting of four vehicles from the 1st Platoon and four from the 2nd Platoon, Troop C. The ninth vehicle (from Troop A, 1st Squadron) was not originally one of the designated escorts, but LT Keltner, noticing this vehicle in the convoy, made it part of his escort unit. The composition of the escort then became tantamount to one armored cavalry platoon.

The convoy had been originally scheduled to depart at 0700H, but changes in the assignment of escort vehicles delayed the departure until approximately 0920. LT Keltner was not given the escort mission until 0840.

LT Keltner organized his escort by placing two ACAV's at the rear of the convoy, and two teams of two ACAV's each evenly placed from front to rear within the convoy. LT Keltner's vehicle was with the team of two ACAV's within the convoy that was closest to the front of the column. From front to rear, the vehicles were

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placed as follows: C22, and C25 followed by trucks; C16, A34, C10, Trucks; C13 and C18, Trucks; and C20 and C22 securing the rear.

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The convoy was controlled by the Forward Air Controller from the time it departed the staging area until it arrived at the Bong Chai base camp. Preplanned artillery support was available to the convoy, however, the escort platoon was not aware of it. The convoy escort commander made radio contact with the Forward Air Controller, (Captain Robert Smith, USAF) prior to the convoy's departure from the staging area. Captain Smith continually kept the 1st Squadron TOC appraised of the progress of the convoy through periodic location reports.

3. The Actions of the Convoy and Convoy Escort During the Ambush.

a. Convoy Escort. The escort commander received warning of a possible ambush when his vehicle was less than 1,000 yards from the ambush site and the lead vehicles of the column were just coming abreast of the ambush location. LT Keltner immediately notified the ACAV's in the escort platoon. (He was unable to contact the lead vehicle.) As he completed his warning call to the escort platoon, the lead vehicle, C-22, called to ask permission to open fire as he was receiving small arms and automatic weapons fire. LT Keltner told him to fire. The time was 1025H. As the column continued to move east toward Xuan Loc, LT Keltner ordered his vehicle to employ reconnaissance by fire into the banana tree area. As soon as LT Keltner opened fire, a mortar round landed behind him and directly in front of the vehicle to his rear, A-34. LT Keltner continued moving toward Xuan Loc while firing into the vegetation on the south side of the road. (His plan was to attempt to move the convoy through the ambush area as quickly as possible.) By this time about half of the convoy (and two groups of ACAV's) was through the killing zone of the ambush and was beyond the Xuan Loc (east) end of the ambush.

if so why did we think to recheck the mortar

As the front portion of the convoy passed the ambush site the west section of trucks led by C-13 and C-18 came abreast of the killing zone of the ambush. Just prior to that time C-18 and C-13 had received LT Keltner's warning and had monitored the lead vehicle's call that it was under fire. (The crew on both vehicles began firing as their vehicles came to a point on the road opposite the west edge of the banana grove.) Their fire was returned immediately by small arms and automatic weapons from both sides of the road. The heaviest fire, however, came from the south side of the road, as it did throughout the ambush. The M-60 gunners on C-18 saw small arms fire and grenades being thrown at the trucks in their area and continued to move toward Xuan Loc. Within twenty-five yards after opening fire, C-18 was hit by a recoilless rifle round at the extreme rear of the track on the right side of the ramp quite close to the bottom of the ramp. This round produced no ill effect on the crew or fighting capability of the vehicle. C-18's crew continued to engage the enemy as it moved to the east. Within 15 seconds, C-18 was hit again by recoilless fire near the engine compartment on the right side of the vehicle. Though the vehicle was stopped, all guns continued firing. Sergeant Scobey, the vehicle commander then discovered the vehicle was on fire. He ordered the crew to evacuate the vehicle. The crew helped Sergeant Scobey (who, though he had been seriously wounded, had continued to command his crew) out of the ACAV. C-18 was then out of the fight.

The other half of the two ACAV team with C-18 was C-13. Almost immediately after opening fire and receiving fire from the ambush, the crew observed the three trucks immediately ahead of them receive hits by small arms, grenades and recoilless rifle or mortar fire. C-13 moved immediately and positioned itself to cover the trucks under fire coming along the right (south) side of the second truck to its front. As it moved along side of the truck, the ACAV received a round of either recoilless rifle or mortar fire that blew off the right gun shield and killed the gunner. Within thirty seconds the ACAV received at least four rounds of recoilless rifle fire but continued to move towards Xuan Loc. About fifteen yards from the second truck, C-13, which continued to engage the enemy even with the entire crew wounded, received another round starting a fire in the engine compartment. While the vehicle was burning, the driver was able to move about 1.5 kilometers down the road toward Xuan Loc (and past the civilian bus the VC had destroyed) before the crew had to abandon it. During this period never once did the crew stop firing.

As C-13 and C-18 were engaging the enemy in the killing zone, LT Keltner was moving the lead portions of the convoy toward Xuan Loc. Meanwhile Sergeant Scobey

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on C-18 called the platoon leader notifying him that C-18 had been hit and that some of the trucks were burning and partially blocking the road. LT Keltner immediately pulled out of the column taking C-10 with him, at the same time directing A-34 to continue on to Xuan Loc acting as the rear guard for that portion of the convoy which had safely passed through the ambush. LT Keltner, (C-16) and C-10 then headed west (back toward Bien Hoa) to the killing zone. After travelling 200 to 300 yards C-16 and C-10 came upon C-13, which was burning with the wounded crew dismounted on the north side of the road. LT Keltner then directed C-10 to remain with C-13 and secure the area for DUST-OFF while C-16 moved alone towards the killing zone firing on both sides of the road. As he was moving, LT Keltner called for a DUST-OFF for the disabled ACAV's crew (the DUST-OFF aircraft, which had come to LT Keltner's platoon frequency, acknowledged his call). (As C-16 moved closer to the ambush, LT Keltner saw seven to ten VC on the road and he engaged them with his 50 Caliber machine gun. At least five VC fell (during this fight the left gunner on C-16 was killed). Those VC not killed by Keltner's crew fled into the jungle on the south side of the road. C-16 continued moving towards the ambush traveling at least thirty-five to forty miles an hour.) At a point about 500 yards from the burning trucks, C-17 was hit by a 57mm recoilless rifle round at the center of the left side, wounding LT Keltner and his right gunner; but both men remained at their posts and the vehicle was still able to fight. A quick inspection of the damage by the crew indicated all the radio equipment had been destroyed by the round, with the exception of the intercom and PRC-25 on top of the vehicle. (By the time C-16 had returned to the location of the burning trucks, the recoilless rifle and mortar fire had ceased and there was only moderate fire) (By this time the armed helicopters had engaged the ambush and two F100's had just begun an air strike). LT Keltner then unloaded his KIA and returned to the burning trucks and continued to C-18's location. As he moved toward C-18, LT Keltner received small arms fire from both sides of the road and returned the fire. After arriving at C-18's location, LT Keltner removed the radios and weapons and returned toward the burning trucks receiving moderate small arms fire. As he was moving toward the trucks he adjusted the second air strike which was brought into an area on the north side of the road. Shortly after this, the firing along the road stopped as the relief force arrived.

b. The Convoy. That portion of the convoy that was forced to stop (due to the burning trucks in the killing zone blocking the road) was the last section of trucks in the column and was behind ACAV C-18. As soon as the lead truck drivers saw that the road was blocked, most of them pulled to the right side of the road, with the personnel and the crewmen dismounting and taking cover in the ditch on the right side of the road. At this time, the trucks were receiving only light small arms fire from the south of the road. Almost immediately after the drivers dismounted and took cover, the volume of small arms fire increased against the trucks as did the volume of automatic and recoilless fire against the ACAV's and trucks to the front. (The drivers and passengers returned the enemy fire with an equally heavy amount of small arms fire (the personnel from the trucks had no automatic weapons except M16 rifles; they had no M-79's or hand grenades).

Within minutes after dismounting, some of the drivers (observed a squad of VC) on the north side of the road (at YT 278100) and at least two drivers engaged the squad with small arms fire. Return fire from the squad hit two trucks. Light fire continued to be directed at the trucks from the south side of the road, and at least one recoilless rifle round was fired at the trucks parallel to the axis of the convoy down the ditch on the south side of the road. The round did no damage, impacting near the police check point on the south side of the road, and near the tail end of the stopped column.

The firing run by the helicopters marked the point at which most of the fire at the trucks ceased. After that time only sporadic fire was received. There was one exception to this, however.

That portion of the rear of the column near the police check point came under heavy small arms fire after most of the fire at the other sections of the convoy had almost stopped. About ten minutes after the F100 air strike was completed, the vehicles near the check point came under fire from the south of the road. Until that time they had received only light sniper fire. Fire was returned by the column but the enemy was not silenced and appeared to be moving closer to the column. This fire fight was in progress as C Troop arrived. C Troop immediately

engaged the force relieving the protection of the convoy.

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4. Army Aviation Support. The 1st Squadron Cavalry Regiment Aviation Platoon of Regimental Headquarters, with assistance from all Squadron Aviation Sections provided valuable fire support for the convoy escort commander. This was accomplished despite problems which might have negated the entire air support effort.

Initially, there was armed helicopter air cover for the column in the form of one UH1B from the 1st Squadron. The Regimental Light Fire Team was split, with one aircraft (Captain George Kinback, Commander, and Captain Berndt Filz, Pilot) on the Long Giao base camp.

As he was flying toward Vung Tau, Captain Kinback was called by the Regimental TOC and told that there was a suspected enemy activity along Highway 1. The Regimental TOC sent coordinates in the clear and told Kinback to move the Light Fire Team to the location. Before Kinback had a chance to call the other gunship in the fire team, the Aviation Section called and said the second helicopter (Captain Frank Sasaki, Commander, and WOW1 James Michie, Pilot) was ready to go and would head immediately for the location given. At that time both gunships were about 15 minutes flying time from the ambush site.

While the Regimental Light Fire Team was moving toward the convoy, the helicopter flying in support of the column engaged the enemy. Captain Nelson of the 1st Squadron Aviation Section was monitoring the escort platoon frequency and was thus in a position to engage the ambushing forces with some knowledge of just where the VC were. He made two firing runs with machine gun and rocket fire (on each run releasing two pairs of rockets) on the south side of Highway 1. His aircraft was engaged by heavy enemy ground fire but was not hit. After two firing runs, Captain Nelson moved north of the road to assess the damage he had inflicted on the enemy. He then observed the Regimental Light Fire team ships forming to make their initial firing pass, and attempted to contact them by radio. He was not immediately successful in making contact, but made contact in time to join the Light Fire Team for the second run on the target.

When his aircraft was about 3 kilometers south of Highway 1 Kinback saw Sasaki's aircraft approaching from Xuan Loc, and saw smoke from one burning truck. Kinback then returned at a point above the west edge of the banana grove and headed west to line up for the first firing pass, with Captain Sasaki falling in behind Captain Kinback. During this preparatory maneuver, both aircraft were receiving fire from the ambush site.

Captain Kinback received no guidance from the ground and was forced to choose his target by observing the ground action. He attacked what did prove to be the area where the VC had placed many of its heavy and automatic weapons. The gunships attacked along the south side of the road, west to east, beginning at the east edge of the jungle continuing for 1,000 yards east, 100 yards south of and parallel to Highway 1.

The first firing run was made by the two UH1B gunships, the second, third, and fourth runs were made by three aircraft, as a gunship from the 1st Squadron, commanded by Captain Turner Nelson, joined the team. All the firing runs consisted of rocket and machine gun fire.

After the fourth firing run the Regimental TOC ordered the gunships to orbit north of the road while the air strikes were being brought in. During this time the three gunships were joined by Captain Kidwell of 2nd Squadron with one gunship.

The group had orbited about four minutes when LLT John Pearson commanding the DUST-OFF helicopter reported receiving fire. Captain Kinback and Captain Sasaki then made a machine gun (their rockets were expended) run to suppress the fire directed against the DUST-OFF helicopter. Captain Kidwell added a rocket firing pass in support of the DUST-OFF. Then all gunships returned to orbit north of the road.

During the ambush and throughout the day the armed helicopter pilots transmit-

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ted spot reports to the Regimental TOC.

Both regimental gunships were struck by enemy ground fire, and one was grounded because of damage received. Both of the regimental gunships had crewmen wounded during the fight.

5. Air Force Support for the Convoy. A Forward Air Controller (Captain Robert Smith) had been over the convoy from the time it had left the staging area until just prior to the ambush. The new FAC (Major Mario Stefanelli) had joined Captain Smith over the convoy immediately prior to the ambush for the purpose of relieving him so that he could return his aircraft to Bien Hoa for refueling and maintenance.

Approximately three minutes prior to the beginning of the firefight Captain Smith received a coded message from the Regimental TOC telling him that there was a suspected ambush on Highway One. At the same time Major Stefanelli relieved Captain Smith who flew north of the road to decode the message he had received. Simultaneously with his decoding of the coordinates, Smith monitored Major Stefanelli receiving the same coordinates in the clear. Captain Smith then heard the platoon leader call Major Stefanelli and stated that he believed he was about half a mile from the ambush location. Stefanelli answered by saying the head of the column was just then passing the location given in the coordinates. Within a minute the first truck was hit and began burning.

The two FAC's immediately divided the area into two parts with each FAC assuming responsibility for directing air strikes in his section. Almost immediately after the ambush was sprung, Major Stefanelli received a call from a FAC attached to the 18th ARVN Division (formerly the 10th ARVN Division) who saw the ground action. The 18th ARVN FAC had two F100's airborne to attack a preplanned target. He offered these aircraft to the 11th Armored Cavalry and Major Stefanelli took the aircraft and ordered them into orbit to allow the armed helicopters to make their runs. During this time neither FAC was able to get direct contact with the ground commander (escort commander) to get instructions on where to place the ordnance, however the squadron commander and S3 Air relayed the information to and from the ground. The F100's had arrived eight minutes after the attack began.

As the armed helicopters left the scene, Smith (who was to direct the F100's) received instructions from the Regimental TOC to strike the south side of the road fifty meters into the jungle. Smith then directed the aircraft to strike the VC ambush positions. He decided to keep the ordnance at least seventy-five meters into the jungle because the bursting radius of the 500 pound bombs carried by the F100's was such that if they had hit within fifty meters of the road, friendly casualties might have occurred. The bombs hit at YT 27450992 and were the first type ordnance delivered by the F100's into the ambush. The F100's were then directed to drop napalm which they did at two locations. Captain Smith had seen enemy troops at YT 28250985 at which location four napalm tanks were dropped, and at YT 28350980 where two napalm tanks were placed. The F100's then placed 20mm cannon fire in strafing runs on a trail running parallel to Highway One about seventy-five meters south of the road in the jungle area.

By the time the F100 air strike was completed, Captain Smith's O-1 aircraft was low on fuel and he had to return to Bien Hoa Air Base.

During the F100 air strike the second flight of aircraft (F5's) arrived at the ambush site and were put into orbit by Major Stefanelli to await the completion of the first air strike. As the first strike was nearing completion Major Stefanelli received instruction from the Air Liaison Officer to strike north of the road into a brush area with CBU bomblets. He requested smoke to verify the location for the CBU strike and received it shortly afterward.

As soon as the F100's had completed their final attack, Major Stefanelli sent the F5's in to strike. The 500 pound bombs were dropped first, followed by the CBU's at YT 28300999. After the CBU's were dropped Stefanelli received instruction from the platoon leader through the Squadron Commander to adjust the napalm closer to the south edge of the tree line where the CBU's had been delivered. He passed these instructions to the F5's and the napalm was adjusted to the satisfaction of the Squadron Commander and LT Keltner.

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6. Additional Comments Concerning the Ambush.

a. Location of the ambush. The coordinates given in the ambush report of 24 November 1966 definitely defined the location of the major portions of the Viet Cong force. However, the statements of individuals in the convoy and the presence of small arms hits in the trucks to the rear of the convoy indicate that the west edge of the VC position was at least as far west as YT 275099. The location of the ambush in six digit coordinates then becomes YT ~~275099~~ to YT 299097, a road distance of 2.5 kilometers. In addition it should be noted that the unit had at least one squad north of the road opposite the rear portion of the convoy.

b. Conduct of the escort. The majority of the fighting was done by the crewmen of only three ACAV's: C-16, C-18, C-13. They acted as individual vehicles rather than part of the platoon. This situation, of course, was determined by the fact that the platoon's vehicles were separated within the convoy. Their response to attack was immediate and aggressive and was clearly aimed at destruction of the enemy and protection of the trucks in the convoy. Though the ACAV's were under intense enemy fire, there appears to have been no panic on the part of any crewmen involved. Obviously, the defense of the convoy was strong enough to prevent its being overrun.

c. Air Support. The air support provided by the armed helicopters, DUST-OFFs, and the high performance aircraft was extremely effective, despite handicaps present in the situation that could have rendered attempts at effective air support virtually impossible.

As previously noted, the armed helicopters received ground fire as soon as they appeared over the area of contact. Though they attempted to gain radio contact with the ground elements, they were unable to do so. They were forced to initiate their attack without guidance from the ground. In effect they became a separate unit engaged in the fight, whereas they could have operated much more effectively as a part of an air-ground team.

The DUST-OFF aircraft were very responsive to the needs of the ground force. This was primarily because the DUST-OFF aircraft operated on the escort platoon's frequency. In addition, the persistence and courage of the DUST-OFF helicopter crew was a factor in its fine performance. The DUST-OFF helicopter received fire on all three pick-ups at the ambush site.

The possibility for error in the high performance air strikes was great. There was no sure way for the FAC to ascertain the exact location of the friendly elements on the first air strike. That the first strike was so successful was because the FAC received general guidance from the Regimental TOC, added his own safety factor, and had observed the action from the beginning. However, had FAC been able to know for certain that the ten to twelve dismounted personnel he had seen in the open early in the ambush were not friendly elements, his aircraft could have achieved many more Viet Cong kills.

The second air strike was under closer ground control than the first, and as a result was much more responsive to the immediate needs of the ground force in contact with the enemy.

In summary the following facts are clearly shown:

First, Air support by both the Army and Air Force elements was effective during the ambush.

Second, had the aviation elements been in contact with the escort commander, their effectiveness would have been greatly increased.

3. Conduct of the truck drivers and accompanying personnel. The drivers of the trucks and the personnel riding in the trucks did not enjoy the advantage of being members of the same unit trained as a team. Most of the individuals had never been in combat before. There were few NCO's and only three officers in that part of the convoy that came under fire.

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Despite this situation, the performance of the men under fire was excellent. They responded to command quickly and obeyed the leaders who were forced to take command when the ambush began. Their return fire was heavy against the ambush. Though there was a report that one man had fled the scene of the ambush, it was later determined that the individual was a medic who had been driving a truck and had mounted an ACAV when a call for medical assistance had come to his attention.

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ANNEX A

REFERENCES

Annex A: References

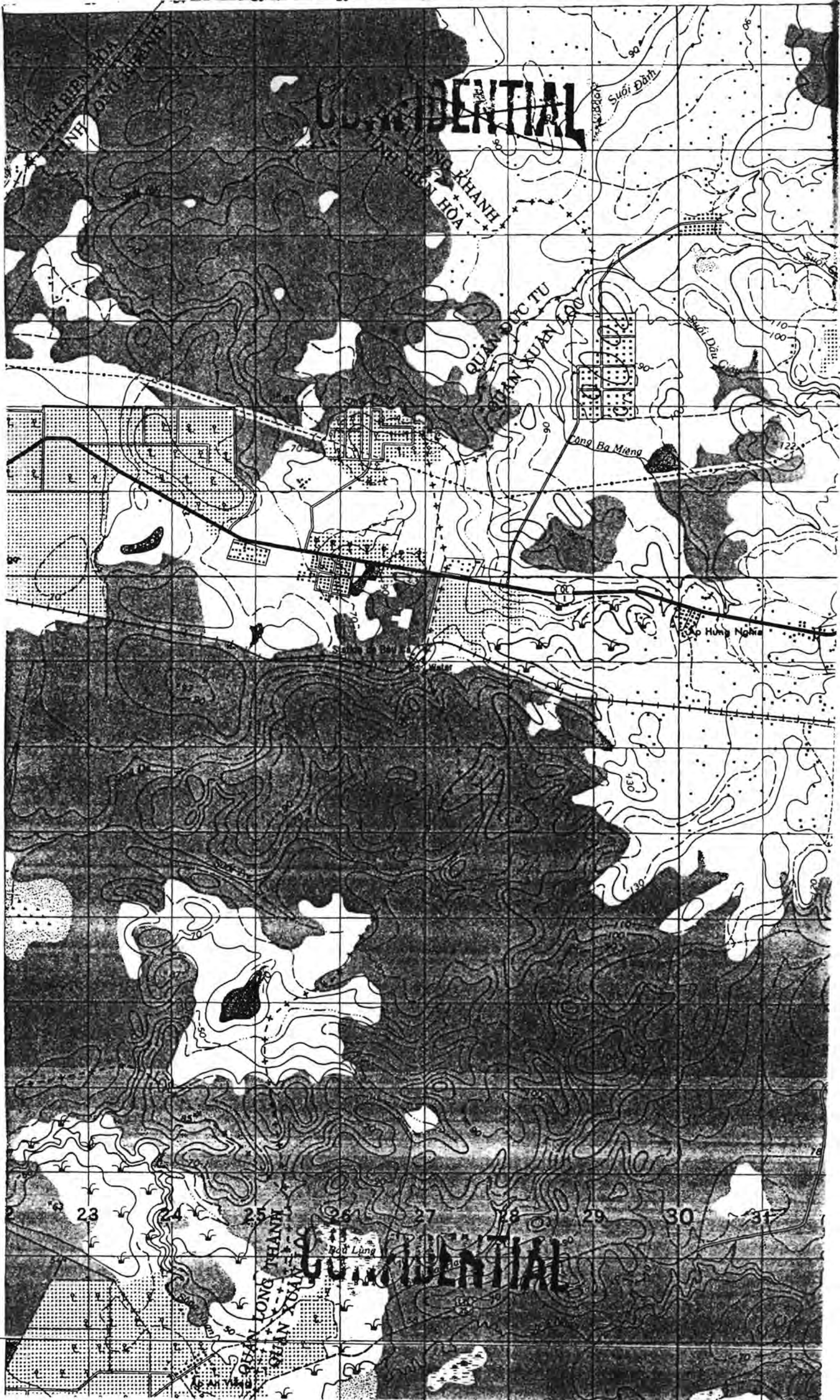
1. Interviews of 16 individuals in the convoy at the time of attack are on file as "Privileged Information" with the 28th Military History Detachment located at (Long Giao base camp) of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, APO San Francisco 96257.
2. Annex H (Attempted Ambush of an 11th Armored Cavalry Convoy) to II Force V Perintrep No 37, dated 28 November 1966, on file with S2, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment.
3. Ambush After Action Report, Headquarters 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, APO San Francisco 96257, dated 24 November 1966, on file with S2, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment.
4. Photographs appearing in Annex E were taken by Captain George E. Kinback Jr., HQ, 11th Armored Cavalry and SP4 Victor N. Mojo, 37th Medical Company, and SP4 Eugene Martinelli, 37th Medical Company. All photographs used were taken as items of personal interest and were not specifically taken for inclusion in official reports. They are used with permission of Captain Kinback, SP4 Mojo, and SP4 Martinelli.
5. Map, Edition, AMS, XA XUAN LOC, Vietnam, 1:50,000 sheet 6430 IV, Series L70L4, 1965.
6. Sketch map, prepared by 1st Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment for MACOV briefing of 8 January 1966, was the basis of the sketch map appearing as ANNEX C.

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ANNEX B

1:50,000 MAP OF
AMBUSH AREA



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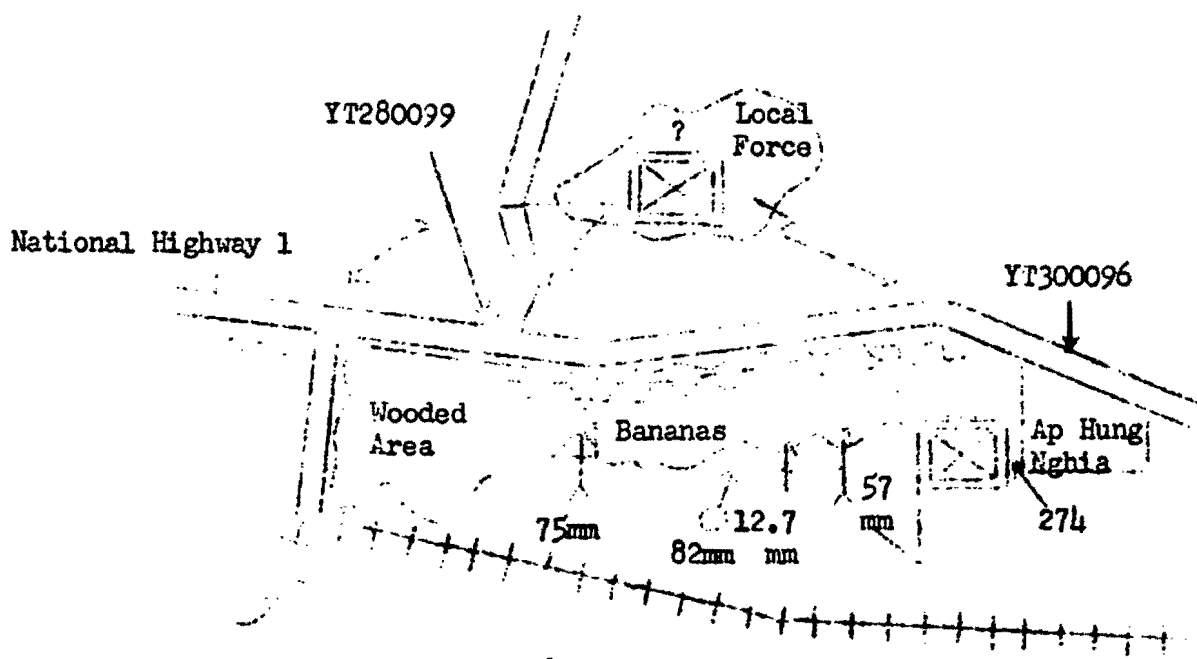
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ANNEX e

SKETCH MAP OF
THE AMBUSH

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SKETCH MAP



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← 2.5 KM →

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ANNEX D

OBSERVATIONS AND
LESSONS LEARNED

Observations and Lessons Learned

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1. Army Aviation

a. Item: Contact between the ground elements and supporting Army Aviation.

b. Discussion:

(1) The commander of the light fire team that supported the convoy was never in direct contact with the escort platoon leader.

(2) The light fire team during the early phases of the ambush received instructions through a cumbersome arrangement which began with the ground commander, went to the squadron command post, then to the regimental command post and from there to the light fire team.

(3) The gunships were forced to make their own estimate to the situation and initiate the first firing runs - the most important ones - with no guidance from the platoon leader. Had the light fire team known that the only dismounted friendly personnel were those in the ditches within ten feet of the road, their fire could have been much more effective.

(4) DUST-OFFs were conducted efficiently because the DUST-OFF pilots operated on the platoon frequency and coordinated directly with the platoon leader.

c. Observation:

(1) Control procedures for all aviation elements in support of convoys must be established prior to the convoy's movement.

(2) Consideration should be given to establishing a common frequency for all air elements operating in support of convoys. The best frequency for this would be the troop command net which is monitored by the platoon leader.

d. Item: Air traffic congestion in the ambush area.

e. Discussion:

(1) At one time during the ambush there were four Ol's, four UH-1C gunships, one DUST-OFF helicopter, and one command helicopter over the ambush site.

(2) With the possible exception of two of the four Ol aircraft all the aircraft in the area were there by necessity.

(3) During the airstrike by the F100's, there was at least one instance where high performance aircraft and army aircraft came too close to each other.

f. Observation: One airborne element should act as traffic control during periods of intense air activities over ground operations.

2. Air Force Close Air Support

a. Item: During the commitment of close air support there was never direct contact between the platoon leader and the Forward Air Controller.

b. Discussion:

(1) Both airstrikes at the ambush site were delayed because the Forward Air Controller had no contact with the platoon leader and had to receive instructions from the platoon leader via the squadron TOC to the regimental TOC and then to the Forward Air Controller.

(2) The initial air strike - though quite effective - was executed on target areas chosen by the Forward Air Controller. Had the ground commander been able to give the FAC guidance the air strikes would have been much more effective.

(3) The FAC aircraft are equipped with ARC-114 radio which has a frequency range from 21 to 51.9 MCC. During November, the command frequencies were all in the 60 MCC range. Therefore the FACs were incapable of monitoring the squadron during November.

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(4) On the second air strike the squadron commander received information on the ground situation from the platoon leader and was able to relay the information to the FAC. The FAC was then able to immediately adjust the air strike and neutralize the area from which heavy fire was being directed. The greatest lesson learned during the ambush concerning air strikes is that air strikes can be adjusted to an exact location, but only when the ground commander and the FAC are in close coordination with each other.

c. Observations:

(1) Until radio equipment in the FAC aircraft can be modified to permit better communication between the FAC and the ground commander, a system of communication developed in order for the air elements to be kept advised of the ground situation.

(2) Consideration should be given the concept that all supporting air (Army and Air Force) be on a common frequency so that all air support elements could be kept informed abreast of the ground situation simultaneously.

3. Armored Cavalry Platoon.

a. Items: The ambush was positioned only 10 to 25 feet from the edge of the road.

b. Discussion: The members of the escort platoon were warned that there was enemy activity at the ambush site and fired into the jungle and banana tree area; but when the VC in the ambush opened fire on the convoy the platoon discovered the enemy was much closer to the edge of the road than had been expected.

c. Observation: When executing reconnaissance by fire at the site of a suspected ambush, the fire should be directed at an area beginning at the vegetation along the edge of the road up to ten meters inside the vegetation.

d. Item: Fighting room inside the ACAV.

e. Discussion:

(1) Frequently all three machine guns were firing during the ambush. Rapid ammunition resupply and the necessity for the M79 gunners to hand ammunition to the three machine gunners and move about the vehicle quickly was essential.

(2) In addition most of the crewmen interviewed felt that having the gear inside the vehicle constituted a fire hazard. It is quite possible that the personal gear in duffle bags in C-13 caught on fire and provided fuel for the fire which spread and destroyed the vehicle.

f. Observation: That the duffle bags, packs and personal gear belonging to the crew members be taken out of the vehicle and placed either behind the trimvane or on a supply vehicle.

g. Item: Resupply of Cal .50 and M60 MG ammunition within the ACAVs.

h. Discussion:

(1) The M79 gunner in the ACAVs provided ammunition to the three machine gunners during the fire fight.

(2) Most crewmen interviewed stated that one man was not enough to resupply the guns at the rate they were expending ammunition.

i. Observation: Modifications should be made to the gun shields and turret on the ACAV to allow more ammunition to be stored in such a position to be immediately available to the machine gunners.

j. Item: ACAV crewmen discomfort or injury to ears.

k. Discussion:

(1) Many ACAV crewmen received ear injuries from the noise of their own weapons firing.

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(2) Some M60 gunners were not wearing headsets during the firefight.

(3) The M79 gunners had no headsets.

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1. Observation: Machine gunners should wear headsets, M79 gunners should wear earplugs if possible.

m. Item: Some crewmen of the ACAVs and trucks knocked out during the ambush were forced to evacuate their vehicles after having used the ammunition and First Aid Packet on their web gear.

n. Discussion:

(1) Most of the wounded crewmen were hit while in the vehicles and many received First Aid in the vehicles.

(2) Many of those wounded had serious enough wounds to require more than one pressure bandage.

(3) The ACAV will obviously not be evacuated until it is on fire or inoperational and under fire from armor defeating weapons. Under these circumstances, crewmen cannot return to the vehicle to get medical supplies or ammunition.

o. Observation: A "Dismount Kit" with a minimum of hand grenades, small arms ammunition, and First Aid packet should be in every vehicle. Should a vehicle be disabled, the crew can take the kit with them. The kit would also be useful for dismounted crewmen when emplacing OP's and LP's.

p. Item: Utilization of medica in convoys.

q. Discussion:

(1) There were two medics in the convoy acting as truck drivers.

(2) When the ACAVs came by the medic's sections of the convoy both mounted the ACAVs and rendered medical assistance to the wounded.

(3) Since neither of the medics were acting in an aidman capacity, they did not have a complete medical aid kit and were forced to use what medical supplies were on hand.

r. Observation: Aidmen, whether acting as drivers or in any other capacity, should be fully equipped to render first aid when riding in convoys.

s. Item: Automatic weapons in convoys.

t. Discussion:

(1) All sections of the convoy were exposed to at least moderate to heavy, small arms fire during the attack.

(2) Not all sections of the convoy had automatic weapons with which they could return fire.

(3) This left parts of the convoy defending themselves against automatic weapons fire with only small arms.

u. Observation: Automatic weapons should be distributed throughout the column.

v. Item: Information and instructions to the truck drivers and crews.

w. Discussion:

(1) There were too few radios distributed throughout the column. Therefore instructions could not be readily passed down to convoy members.

(2) The drivers of the few radio vehicles in the convoy did not have an assigned frequency nor call sign.

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x. Observation: Radio vehicles should be distributed throughout the convoy and drivers should be given an assigned frequency and call sign.

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h. Additional Lessons Learned: The following comments were made by individuals in the convoy and convoy leaders in answer to the question: "What lessons did you learn from the ambush?"

"The VC fears the ACAV".

"Wear the flak jacket". (This was repeated many times)

"Keep your earphones on to save your ears".

"Don't expect to see anyone in a firefight - Just shoot".

"My man fired too high".

"Keep extra barrels handy for the M60".

"The best place for the First Aid pack is on the flak jacket".

"Make the drivers clean their vision blocks every chance they get".

"When you're ambushed get out of the truck fast".

"If the VC is firing recoilless rifles at you, swerve the track".

"We need more tracks in convoys".

"Men with automatic weapons fired up their ammo too fast. A semi-automatic weapon is best unless a man is well trained".

"Keep grenades handy".

"There ought to be a way to load the M60 faster".

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By YSW/EM NARA, Date 8/4/87

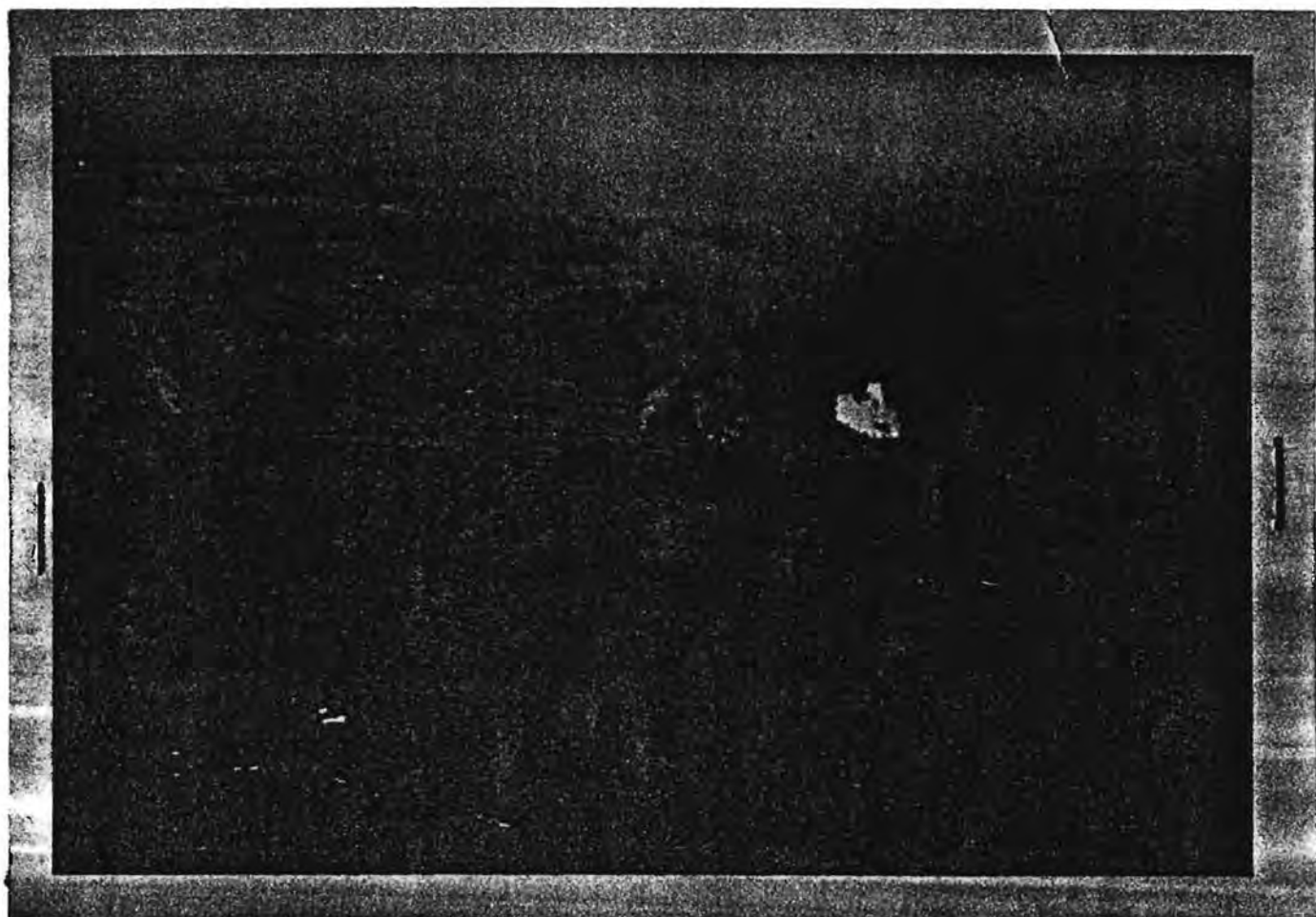
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ANNEX E
PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE ALBUSH

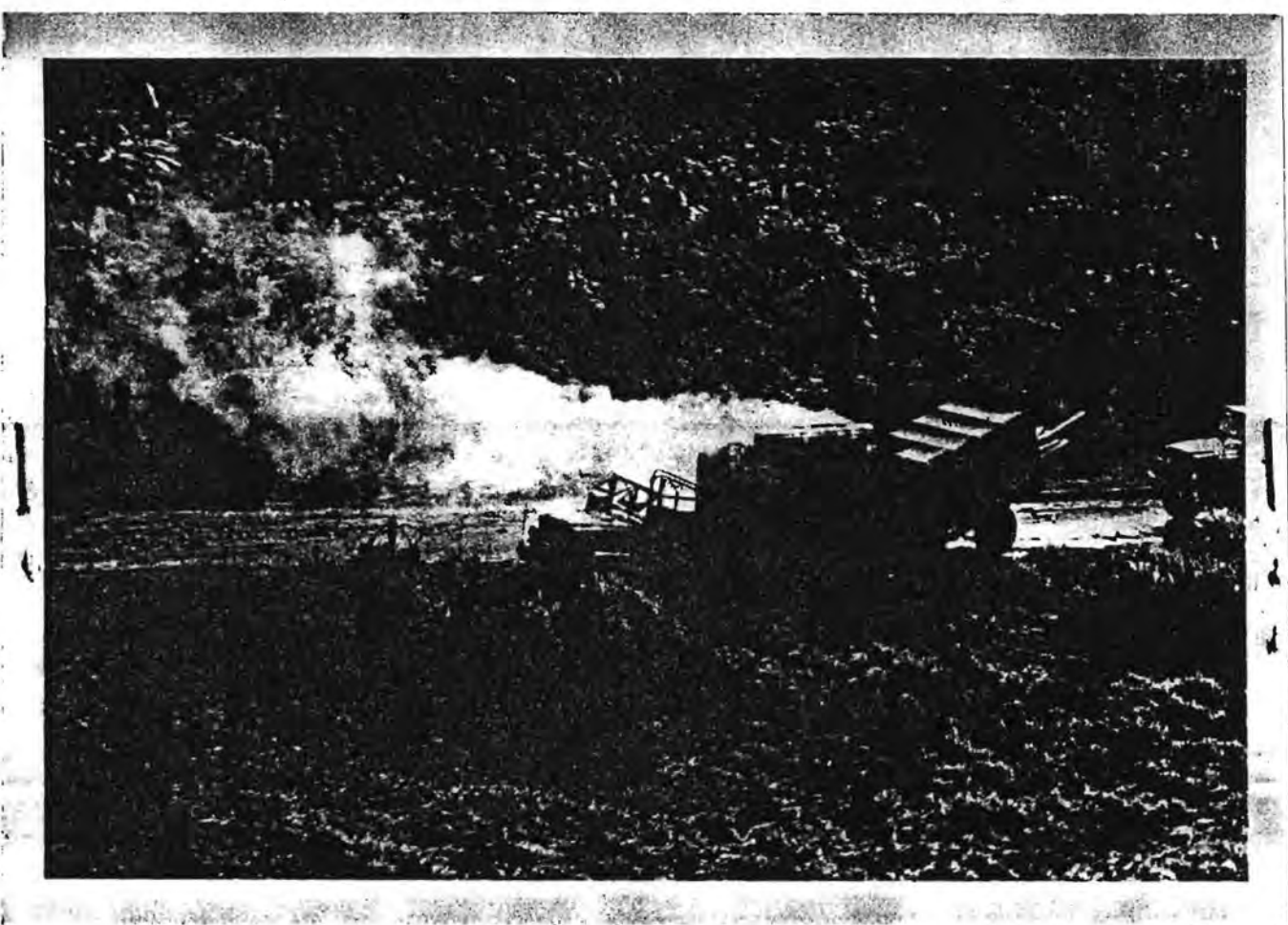
By YSW/Em

NARA, Date

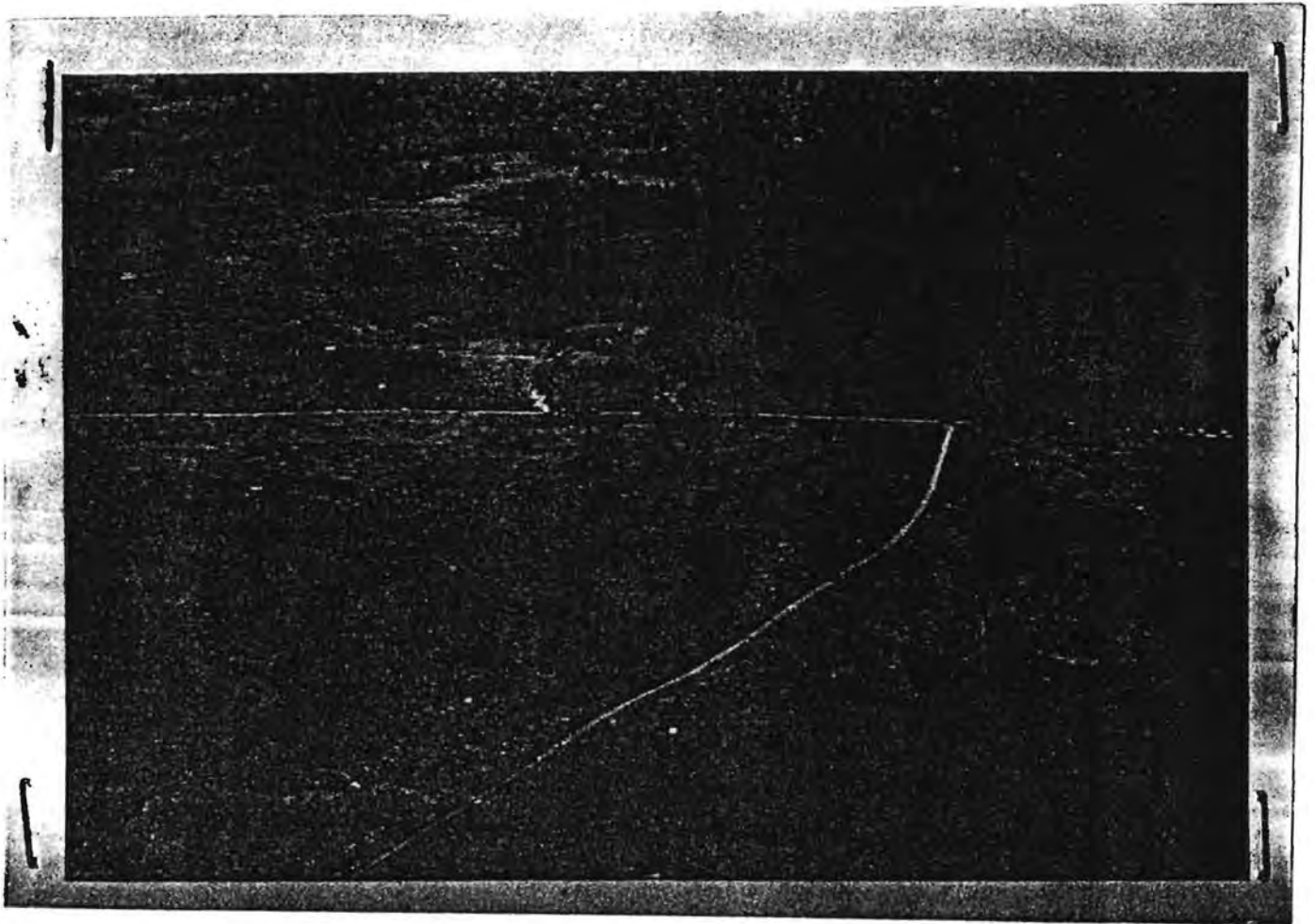
8/4/87



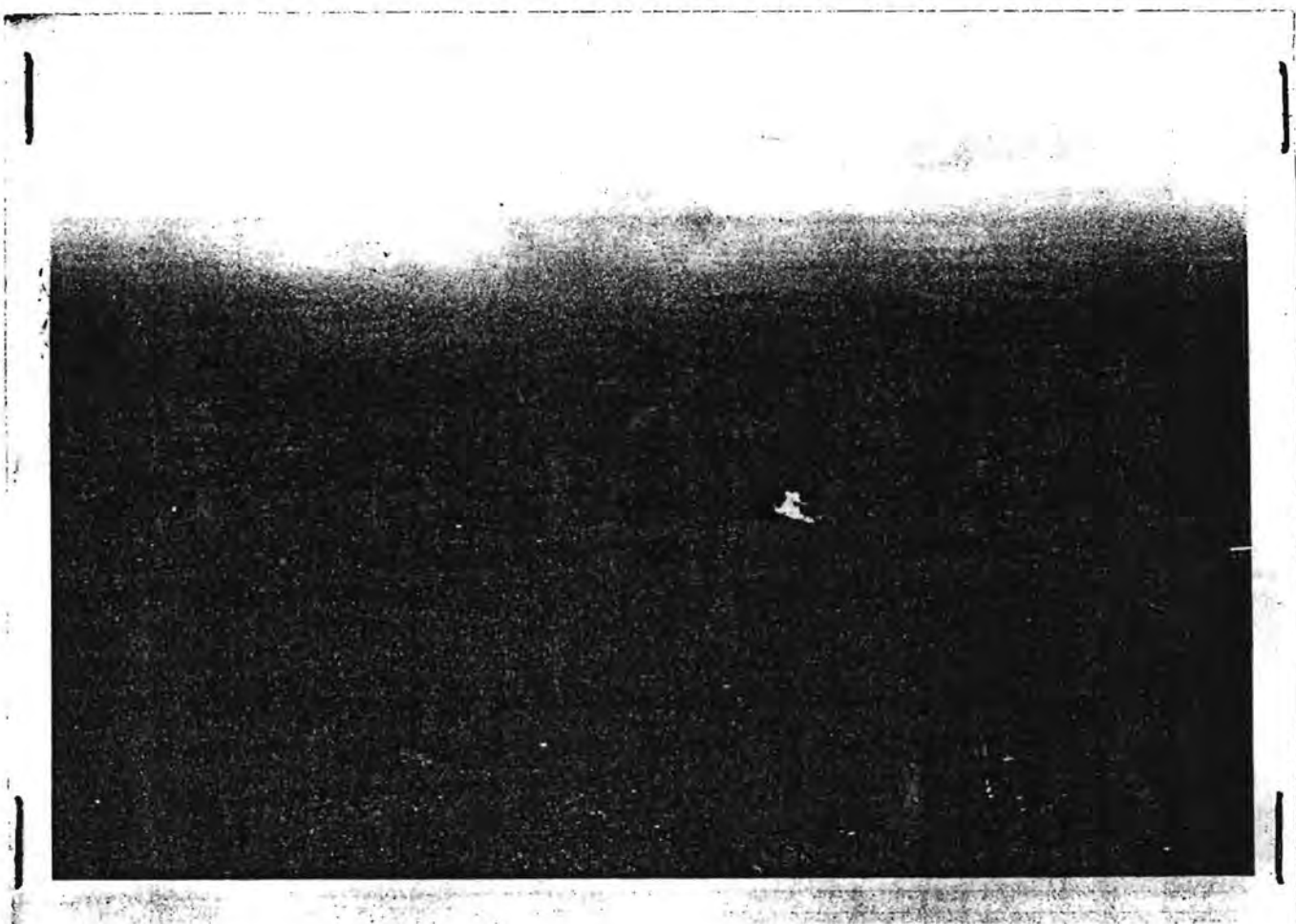
Convoy halted at ambush site. Smoke at left side
of photograph is from burning ACAV.



Lead truck of that section of the convey that was hit by recoilless rifle fire in the killing zone.



Convoy halted at ambush. Trucks at center of photograph are in the killing zone.



Convoy halted at ambush site. White smoke at right center shows location of first bombs delivered by first air strike.



VC killed by 50 Caliber MG fire.

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ANNEX H (ATTEMPTED AMBUSH OF AN 11TH ACR CONVOY) TO II FFORCEV PERINTREP NO 37.

1. A review of the details and background of the action on 21 Nov, in which elements of two VC battalions attacked an 11th ACR convoy, provides a means for examining several aspects of a favorite enemy tactic - the ambush. Although civilian and military traffic on Highway #1 had proceeded without hindrance for several weeks, there was reason to be alert to the possibility of enemy action. One fact which had been discovered almost a month before was the VC plan to attack ARVN convoys on Highway #1 beginning in November. This information had been learned from the translation of a captured notebook which had belonged to the deputy commander of the 274th Regt. The notebook identified several specific objectives, one of which was Hung Loc (YT 3209), which was the scene of suspicious civilian activity earlier in the month.

2. At 211010 Nov a 41-vehicle convoy escorted by a cavalry platoon from the 1/11th ACR was approaching the hamlet of Hung Nghia, two kilometers west of Hung Loc, on Highway #1, when SA, AW and RR fire was received from both sides of the highway. Fire was promptly returned, two LFT, supported and three Tac Air strikes were called in on the enemy positions. Contact was broken by the VC at 211137 Nov as the 1/11th Cav reaction force began arriving via the trail running from Ong Que (YT 3999) to Cam Chau (YT 3400) to Hung Nghia (YT 3009) and via Highway #1 from Long Binh. Initial observations were that the enemy had withdrawn to the north, however, later discoveries in the vicinity of the ambush site indicated that small VC elements had retreated to the north while the main body had withdrawn to the south, possibly into preselected rally points several kilometers south of Highway #1. It is possible that the main VC force subsequently withdrew into its habitual base camps in the Hat Dich area. Although seven US were KIA and eight WIA, and two M113s and four 2 1/2 ton trucks were destroyed, enemy losses totalled 28 KIA (BC), 10 M113s, 2 M48 tanks, 1 M41 tank, 1 M42 mortar, 1 M79 mortar, 1 M16 rifle, and one AK 47 rifle captured.

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1310-1137

1 hr 25 min to combat - see to report
27 min - combat

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Documents found on some of the VC dead indicated that elements of two battalions, the 1st and 2d of the 274th Regt were involved in the attack. From the appearance of entrenchments and bivouac sites along the sides of the highway it appeared that the enemy had not been in the area long and that perhaps his plan had been prematurely triggered.

3. This action illustrates the VC's continued attempts to engage US FVMAF convoys at locations which facilitate the enemy's withdrawal after the initial contact, and at a point which exposes the convoy to fire from unexpected directions. In spite of the 11th ACR's success in defeating the ambush it is possible that the success could have been more decisive, if security, liaison, and reporting had been more effective.

4. In addition to the intelligence from the captured notebook, there were two other more specific warnings on the morning of 21 November. One was the detonation of a mine by resupply train at 0800 at YT 283087, resulting in the engine and two cars being derailed. The other was a contact by the 43d Regt Recon Co with a VC squad vic YT 248084 at 0845. The attack on the convoy occurred an hour and a half later almost exactly midway between these two incidents and a kilometer to the north. The reports of these two incidents did not reach the 11th ACR until hours after the attack on the convoy. The normal channel of reporting was apparently followed from the ARVN Recon Co to its parent regiment and thence to division and to III Corps. On that particular morning the line from III Corps TOC to II FFORCEV TOC was out of order and the transmission of vital information needed by the 11th ACR was therefore delayed.

Does not square w/ search log by 73 grd unit of attack 10 min before

5. Several major lessons may be learned from this event. From an intelligence as well as an operational standpoint is essential that active liaison be maintained between units and agencies sharing an area of interest. A US convoy passing through an ARVN area of operations must not rely solely on information received from the

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chain of command but must actively seek out intelligence from all friendly units and agencies in the area. An exchange of information at the battalion or brigade level will thus ensure that all US/PVNAF units in a given area are fully informed on the latest enemy situation in their immediate vicinity. A vigorous implementation of this practice will preclude the often repeated experience in which US and ARVN units fighting the same enemy are unaware of contacted enemy forces less than a kilometer away.

6. A second and more important lesson to be learned is that information gained on enemy intentions must be acted on, regardless of whether or not it has been recently obtained. In this instance it appears likely that the attack was in implementation of the plan outlined in the deputy commander's notebook, although with certain modifications. The other objectives - Phuoc Hoa and the 1st AMP - have not as yet been attempted. It is therefore especially important that all units in the Bien Hoa - Long Khanh - Phuoc Thuy area be alert to the possibility of additional attacks on Highways 1, 2, and 15 in the last week of November and in December.

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I atsum 22 10

" An 11th Armored Cav convoy, escorted by a platoon from C Troop, 1st Cav was ambushed from vicinity YT 275100 to YT 290099. Fire was returned with Cal. 50 MG; 7.62mm MG and individual weapons. Two light fire teams, three air strikes, and artillery fired in support. 1st Cav moved to the ambush site as a reaction force. Major contact was broken by the VC at 21137H. Sporadic contact continued throughout the day. Results: 14 VC KIA (BG) including at least one VC (7 detainees (later released))

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then 28
Th 30

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1 57 MM Recoilless Rifle and 1
AK-47 assault Rifle captured.
US losses were 7 KIA, 8 WIA,
2 M113s destroyed and 1
damaged, 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ Ton Trucks
destroyed, and 1 UH1B
damaged. (CONT)

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