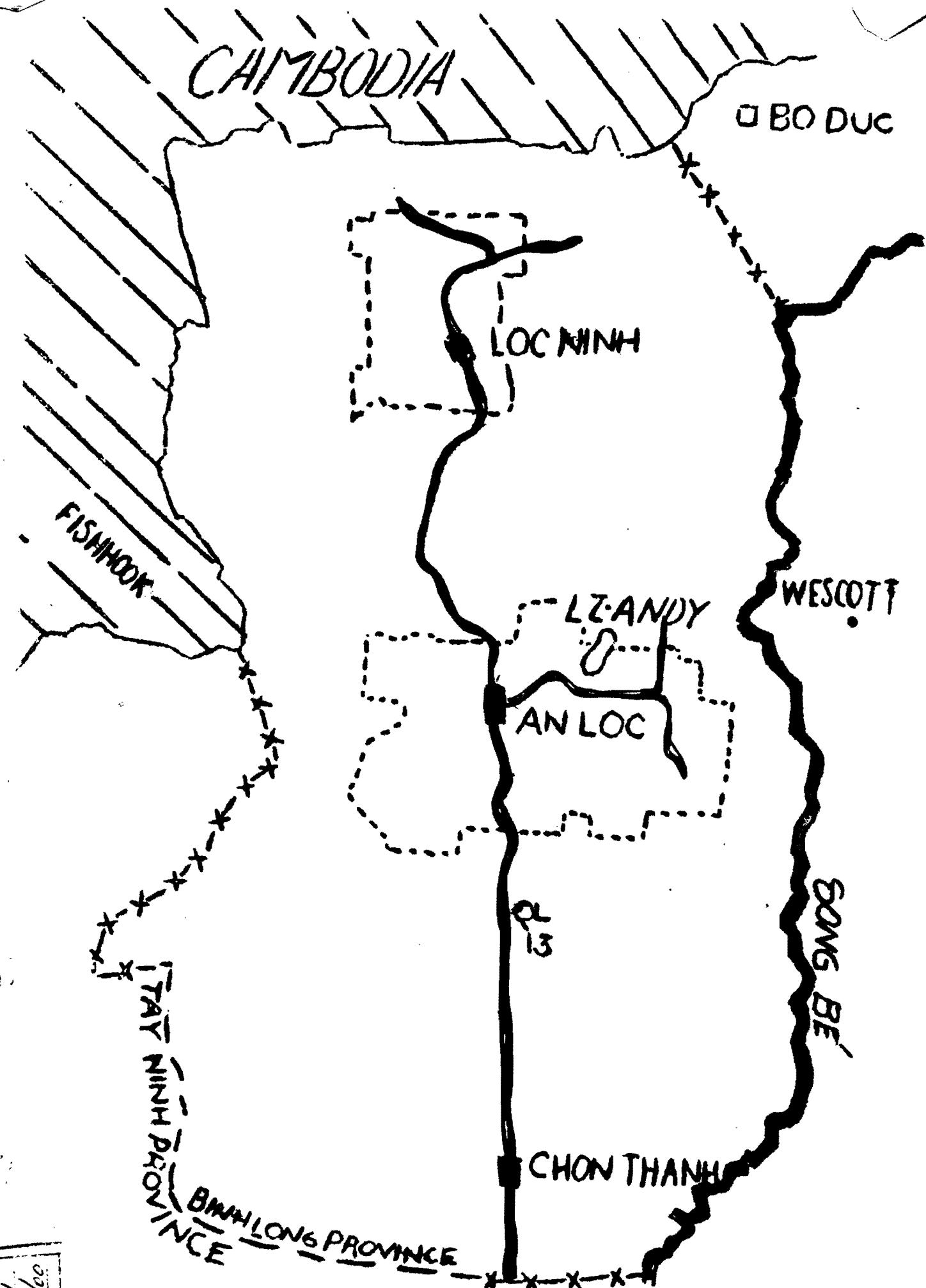


RG472 (15) VN
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Note: 1st Inf 1500 troops
Involved

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The Battle of Binh Long Province

August 1969

J. HOTTELL

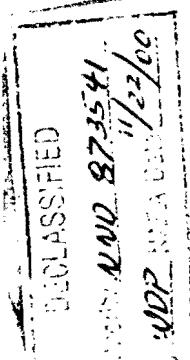
DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
 14TH MILITARY HISTORY DETACHMENT
 1ST CAVALRY DIVISION (AIRMOBILE)
 APO San Francisco 96490

AVDAMH

SUBJECT: The Battle of Binh Long Province, August 1969. 5-69.

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF MILITARY HISTORY
 DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
 WASHINGTON, D.C. 20315

1. Operation: Kentucky Cougar
2. Period Covered: 25 July - 12 August 1969.
3. Location: Binh Long Province, Republic of Vietnam.
4. Control Headquarters: 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile).
5. Participating Elements: 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile); 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment; 9th Infantry Regiment (ARVN); 1st Battalion (-), 16th Infantry (Mechanized), 1st Infantry Division; A Troop, 1st Squadron, 4th Armored Cavalry, 1st Infantry Division.
6. Mission: To conduct operations throughout the Province with special attention to pacification and up-grade of ARVN units, and prevention of interference by main-force NVA units.
7. Persons Interviewed: (Letters in parentheses indicate the interviewer)
 - a. MAJ GEN E. B. Roberts, Commanding General, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). (a)
 - b. BRIG GEN George W. Casey, Assistant Division Commander (Operations), 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). (a)
 - c. COL Robert M. Shoemaker, Chief of Staff, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). (a)
 - d. COL James H. Leach, Commanding Officer, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. (a)
 - e. COL John P. Barker, Commanding Officer, 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). (a)
 - f. LTC Ma Son Nhon, Commanding Officer, 9th Infantry Regiment (ARVN). (a)
 - g. LTC Lawrence Wright, Commanding Officer, TF Wright, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. (a)
 - h. LTC Kenneth Cassels, Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry (Mech), 1st Infantry Division. (c)
 - i. LTC Richard W. Wood, G-3 Officer, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). (a)
 - j. LTC Angelo Perry, Deputy Commanding Officer, 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). (a)
 - k. LTC Francis Ianni, Executive Officer, 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). (a)
 - l. LTC James A. Graham, Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). (a)
 - m. MAJ Robert D. Foley, S-2, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. (a)

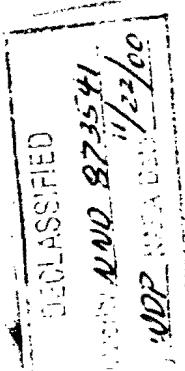


- h. MAJ John O. Blake, Executive Officer, 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). (a)
- o. Maj Karl Gropsey, S-3, 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). (a)
- p. MAJ Robert V. Defavero, S-3, 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). (a)
- q. MAJ James A. Abrahamson, S-3 Plans, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. (a)
- r. MAJ James E. Harris, Jr. S-3, 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry (Mech), 1st Infantry Division. (c)
- s. MAJ Donald L. McShane, G-3 Plans Officer, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). (a)
- t. MAJ James B. Motley, Assistant G-3 Plans Officer, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). (a)
- u. MAJ Dudley L. Tademy, G-3 Air, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). (a)
- v. CPT William J. Newell, Commanding Officer, A Troop, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 1st Infantry Division. (c)
- w. CPT Robert A. Delaar, Commanding Officer, C Company, 8th Engineer Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). (a)
- x. 1LT Stephen B. Grubb, Aide-de-camp, Assistant Division Commander (Operations), 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). (a)
- y. 1LT Gary Farington, Blue Sector Commander, 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). (a)
- z. 1LT Thomas R. Kelley, Intelligence Analyst, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. (a)
- aa. 2LT Mark J. Wilson, Platoon Leader, E Troop, 2d Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. (b)
- bb. PSG Lawrence D. Noland, Jr. Platoon Leader, 2d Platoon, A Troop, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 1st Infantry Division. (c)
- cc. SFC Joseph W. Weber, Intelligence Analyst, Division Advanced Command Post, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). (a)
- dd. SP/5 James E. Foote, Driver, 1st Platoon, E Troop, 2d Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. (b)
- ee. SP/4 Greenville Braman, A&D Clerk, 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). (a)
- ff. SP/4 Jeffrey A. Hanson, NCS Radio Operator, 2d Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. (b)
- gg. SP/4 Joseph D. Corbin, Gunner, C Company, 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry (Mech), 1st Infantry Division. (d)
- hh. SP/4 William Florio, Assistant Gunner, A Company, 1st Battalion (Mech), 1st Infantry Division. (d)
- ii. Richard E. Ross, Interrogation Team, S-2, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. (a)

8. Interviewers:

- a. CPT John A. Hottell, Division Historian, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile).
- b. 1LT William S. Jenks, Assistant Division Historian, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile).
- c. 1LT Joseph F. Frisz, Assistant Division Historian, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile).
- d. PFC Joseph P. Coughlin, Writer, 14th Military History Detachment, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile).

9. All sketches, maps, and overlays in this report were drawn by SP4 Joseph R. Sanchez, 14th Military History Detachment Combat Artist.



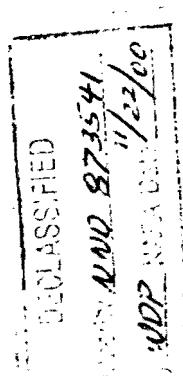
THE BATTLE OF BINH LONG PROVINCE
AUGUST 1969

I. PREFACE.

"Defense" and the tactical considerations entailed in this concept are usually considered something of a blacksheep in the military lexicon. The connotations of surrendering the initiative to the enemy and loss of surprise, along with all the detriments that being in such a posture normally includes, such as a penchant for "second-guessing the enemy" and the disaster that this invites, normally leads the combat commander to avoid the defensive situation whenever he can. Add to this the simple fact that planning for the defense is vastly more complex and therefore more vulnerable to the talons of "Murphy's Law" (if something CAN go wrong, it will) on all levels of consideration and execution, and defensive tactics rather clearly becomes a necessary evil - merely a description of what one does between attacks.

But in war the meek do not inherit much, and the present case under study, that of the defense of Binh Long Province by the First Cavalry Division in early August 1969, is a classic successful defense in the Vietnam War. All available resources of intelligence and firepower were employed to maximum effect, and meticulous planning followed by violent and expert execution won a great victory for the US Forces and our allies.

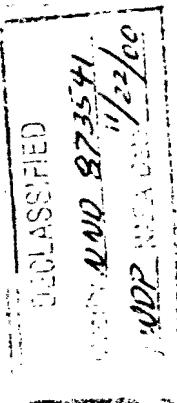
The operation was characterized by teamwork; elements of the First Cav, the First Infantry Division, the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, and the 5th ARVN Division participated, and all took part in the fighting during the offensive. Intelligence played a key role in our success, and in no case was there the petty jealousy and with-holding of information that all too often characterizes joint intelligence operations. The spirit of cooperation that this shows pervaded all aspects of planning and execution and was as great a



contributor as anything else to the overwhelming success that was ours.

But when all the planning was done and all the intelligence gathered and all the bombs dropped and all the artillery fired, it was left to the American fighting man to display his courage and ability to react to the demands of the moment. The fighting was brutal, close, and tough, some of the heaviest fighting in the field that the First Cav has had for some time, but in no instance did duty suffer and the enemy was bested overwhelmingly on the fields of his choosing.

It is to the "Skytroopers" and his comrades-in-arms that we build our monuments.



THE BATTLE OF BINH LONG PROVINCE

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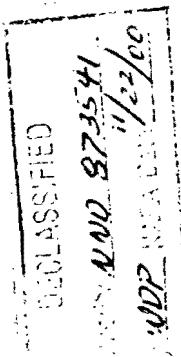
PART I: THE BATTLE OF BINH LONG PROVINCE

The month of June 1969 saw the deployment of the Third Brigade of the First Cavalry Division and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR) into Binh Long Province. Both units set up their headquarters in the old First Infantry Division Base at Quan Loi, only a few kilometers to the east of the province capital at An Loc. The region and the units were not strangers to each other, as the Fishhook is a favorite base area of several enemy divisions, and quite a few bloody battles had been fought in the past around An Loc and the district seat further north at Loc Ninh. The situation now, however, was slightly different.

Within recent months the Communists had set up a so-called "Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam" as an alternative to the Thieu Government in Saigon, and it was suspected that they would attempt to gain a province capital in the South, however temporarily, in which to establish it. An Loc and the province of Binh Long seemed a very likely target. The First Cav moved to deny it to the enemy.

I. THE TERRAIN.

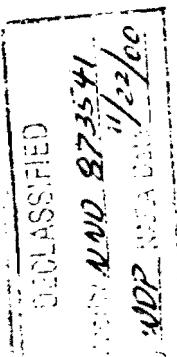
The terrain in the area presents quite a number of advantages to a potential attacking force. Foremost among these is the relative proximity of established Communist base areas in Cambodia; the straight-line distance from the Fishhook to An Loc is less than 20 Kilometers. Further, the enemy's presence in the Fishhook, if detected, would not necessarily indicate his target as attacks could be launched from that promontory to the Southwest, South, or East without, in the absence of other intelligence, our being able to foretell the actual direction of attack until it was too late. The Fishhook is, in this sense, a natural strategic choice for a base area.



In addition, the terrain between the Cambodian border and An Loc is first, extremely thick and sometimes marshy bamboo and jungle, in which, the enemy has learned, it is very difficult for us to pin him down. Then, for some seven kilometers to the west of An Loc, and virtually surrounding it, is one of the largest rubber plantations in South Vietnam. Approximately 149 square kilometers around An Loc and Quan Loi is in rubber, extending for 22 kilometers North-to-South and 12 kilometers East-to-West. Loc Ninh is also surrounded by some 70 square kilometers of plantation in a ten kilometer by eight kilometer area, and it is a mere six kilometers from the northern edge of this plantation to the Cambodian border.

The plantations are still quite productive, in spite of the war, and their neat rows of trees, in perfect dress and cover, provide a canopy that prevents both undergrowth and aerial observation. An added bonus is the fact that the trees are planted in perfect North-South and East-West rows, which makes navigation, even on the darkest night, a simple matter. The NVA has found that it can travel vast distances in a short time at night in this king of rubber without being channeled onto trails for predictable avenues of approach, and his reconnaissance elements can move through it during the day without being spotted from the air. So it is that areas such as Loc Ninh and An Loc present targets that have virtually an infinite number of good avenues of approach suitable for use in large-scale night attacks.

But rubber plantations have similar advantages for the allies, and experience has taught us to make the most of them. Foremost among these is that it is suitable terrain for armor. The trees are for the most part some five to seven meters apart, which allows for easy movement of tanks and armored personnel carriers, and the same lack of undergrowth that aids the enemy helps us to as great a degree with the mobility of armor. So it was natural to team the 11th



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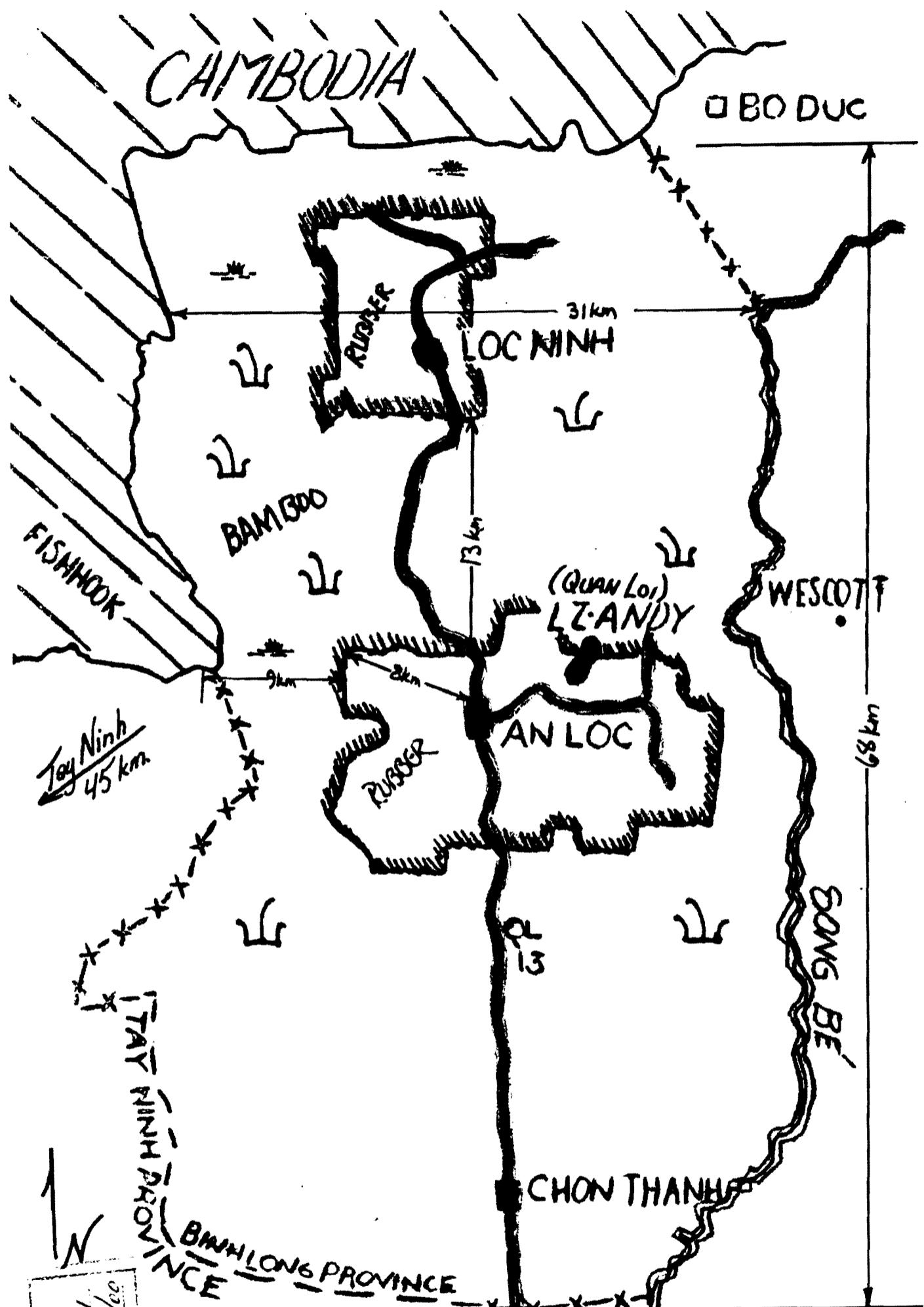


CHART I

THE TERRAIN

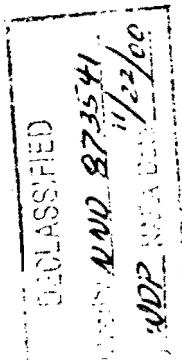
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ACR with the Third Brigade in the defense of the area, and the marriage of the two units was indeed a happy one.

Another advantage the allies have in rubber is that in it they can bring their vastly superior small arms and automatic weapons firepower to bear more effectively. The unobstructed fields of fire in 36 directions around the clock provided by the neat rows of trees and lack of undergrowth, would place the enemy at a distinct disadvantage when pitted against even a numerically inferior allied force. As will be seen later, one platoon was able to stand on its own against an enemy battalion for two hours, until it was reinforced, and there is no reason to believe that it could not have continued to do so by itself if ammunition had not run low.

Other aspects of the terrain in Binh Long Province are the Song Be River and Highway QL 13. The latter runs, as chart I shows, generally North-South right down the axis of the province connecting Chon Thanh, An Loc, and Loc Ninh, and is thus the vital artery of the area. It is a hard-surface, all-weather road which can definitely be classified in Vietnam as a high-speed avenue of approach. With armor deployed along it in stronghold positions, QL 13 could conceivably afford the defenders with interior lines in the event of an attack from the West. It can be argued whether such a thing as "interior line" even exists in the Vietnam War situation, but it will be seen that in this particular attack, we did, in fact, have interior lines, and it was put to good use. QL 13 could not have been considered any thing but the most critical of key terrain, and one of the missions of the 11th ACR was to defend it and keep it open.

Also running North-South some 12 kilometers to the East of the highway is the Song Be River. At the time of year in question, at the end of the monsoon season, the river is roughly 30 to 40 meters wide, with a swirling, dangerous

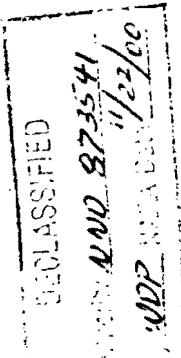


current and steep, overgrown banks. It definitely presents an obstacle to the rapid deployment of infantry troops into Binh Long Province for the East; however the vegetation is quite thick on both sides of the river in this vicinity, and if the enemy were willing and able to take the time, he could conceivably find concealment long enough to cross it in small groups.

II. INITIAL DEPLOYMENTS.

With the terrain playing such an important role, a division of labor between the armor and infantry was arrived at that assigned the armor, with infantry units attached, to the rubber and QL 13, while the infantry units of THE FIRST TEAM concentrated on the Song Be and the more thickly-vegetated areas which were unsuitable for armor. The general division of the province between the Third Brigade and the 11th ACR is shown in Chart II. The actual boundaries, of course, changed many times in response to the tactical situation and resources, but the territorial responsibilities and the division of labor they represent, remained substantially the same throughout the period before the attack.

At lower levels of command, still further divisions of labor between the armor and the infantry took place. Instead of simply mounting the infantry that was attached to the 11th ACR on tracks, and decreasing the fighting capability of both, it was decided to get the most out of the differing capabilities of the units of both arms. The infantry with its ability to move, albeit slowly, through extremely thick vegetation and to deploy into an area silently, was used as forward early warning and ambushes in the areas just outside the rubber. The armor, with its mobility and firepower and lack of stealth, took up central positions in the rubber from which it could quickly reinforce the infantry units which were then able to divide up into squad-size outposts and spread out over a greater area than they could normally cover



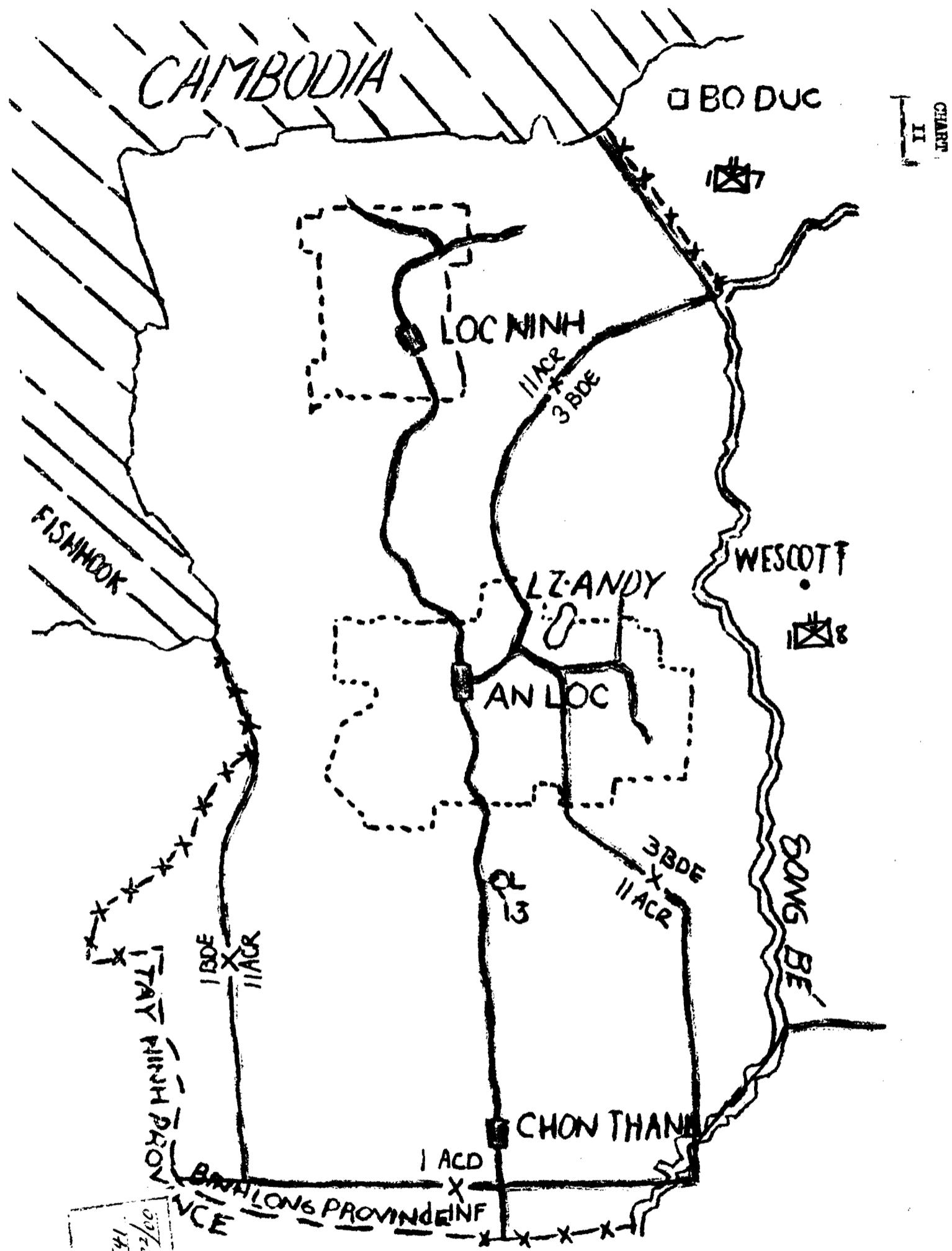


CHART II
Initial Disposition

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without the support of the armor. The armor by itself could have been easily detected and by-passed by an attacking enemy force and the infantry by itself covering the same amount of terrain (up to 4 kilometers per company) would have been slightly over-extended. But together, in a combined arms team, they effectively established the security of the area.

There were further missions that the FIRST TEAM was to accomplish in the province in addition to the obvious one of preventing intrusion by main-force NVA units. These were pacification and improvement of the ARVN forces in the area.

This latter mission received increased emphasis in June when Lt. General Do Cao Tri, the Commanding General of the ARVN III Corps Tactical Zone, announced his "Dong Tien" (Progress Together) program which was to begin on the first of July. The idea was to prepare the ARVN 5th Division, which had been having problems, to take over tactical responsibility for the area on its own by conducting as many combined and coordinated operations employing both ARVN and US troops as would be feasible. The Assistant Division Commander (Operations) was to be the First Cav point of contact with the elements of the 5th ARVN Division for command liaison, and would also be responsible for coordination with the Province Chief, Regional Force and Popular Force units, and the efforts of CORDS in the area as well.

After the first few halting steps, "coordinated" operations began increasing in frequency, with troops from the First Cav and the 11th ACR working together with ARVN's, RF's, PF's, and CIDG's. It is emphasized that these were "coordinated" operations and not really combined operations as there was no question of anyone being under the operational control of anyone else; ARVN's and Skytroopers, each with their own command structure, simply worked together on search and clear operations, combat assaults, and hammer and anvil sweeps, with the ARVN's making an increased number of kills. In the period 1-22 July there were a total of 42 joint ARVN-US operations throughout the FIRST TEAM area of operations.

In many ways the battle that was to come was to be the proof of the pudding, as it saw ARVN's and Americans fighting side-by-side in effectively denying the enemy goal.

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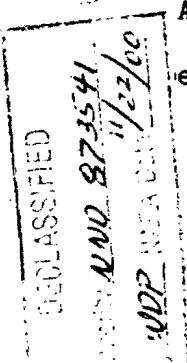
III. THE INTELLIGENCE BUILD-UP AND HOI CHANH AN

It is almost axiomatic that the key to successful defensive operations is intelligence. Sufficiently accurate advanced information can actually transfer the initiative from the hands of the attacker into those of the defender, but as always in intelligence matters, the mere availability of information is only a part of the picture. The commander and his staff are confronted with a welter of unrelated facts and reports, many of them in conflict with each other, and it is quite often only with hindsight that they coalesce into clear indications of what was to come. It takes a little courage to take a stand and predict the course the enemy will take...

At 1800 hours on the 29th of July, three kilometers to the west of An Loc (Circle 4, Chart IV), a young man walked up to the 214th Regional Force Company in Binh Ninh and expressed a desire to "Chieu Hoi". He was taken to the Chieu Hoi center at An Loc on the 31st and was discovered there the same day when the interrogation team from the 11th ACR made a routine visit. His name was Nguyen Van An, 19 years old, and he said that he was a forced laborer/porter for the 9th VC Division which he claimed was in the Fishhook area. He was obviously intelligent and cooperative, and he gave the interrogators a list of AKA's (Also Known As) and personnel he said were in his unit as well as explaining rather thoroughly the organization of his division.

Several things were strange about his story. For one thing, it was felt that the 9th VC Division was still in the vicinity of the Angel's Wing in western Tay Ninh Province. While it was true that this Division had not been positively located for over a month, it seemed unlikely that it could move that far without our knowing it, and there were no indications, other than An's story, to substantiate his claim that it had moved to the Fishhook. It was known, of course, that the 9th Division had used the Fishhook as a base area in the past and had operated in Binh Long Province before, but without corroboration of any sort, An's story was just not very convincing.

Another puzzling thing, however, was that he displayed far too much knowledge as a simple forced laborer who had been with the 9th Division for only 59 days.



It is highly unlikely that anyone in such a position would know even a fraction of the information that An tried to give, but most perplexing of all was the fact that some of the things he said actually checked out with information already known to the interrogators. The AKA's he had given, further, had not been used for TWO YEARS, and this was definitely inconsistent with the other things he said. Fortunately, indeed most fortunately, he was not dismissed out of hand as a crackpot and the questioning continued in spite of the inconsistencies. Had the interrogators been less thorough-going and less persistent the forces defending Binh Long Province would have been without the vital information that contributed so much to the success of the operation.

On 2 August the interrogation team decided that An must be something more important than the porter he was pretending to be, and it was decided that they would have to try to convince him to tell the truth. When they arrived at the Chieu Hoi center, however, An ran out to greet them and started telling them the real story almost at once. It is difficult to say what brought about this decision on his part; but it is quite possible that he had gained some faith in the treatment he had received since giving himself up, as he had been treated quite well. The interrogators had even taken him out to eat once.

Piece by piece the story came out, and as it did, things began to make a little more sense. By the evening of the second of August the interrogation team was satisfied that they had at least a coherent report, if not a true one.

An was actually a platoon leader in the H21 Sapper Recon Company, 272nd Regiment, 9th VC Division. He had been fighting for five years without even going home, and he was convinced he would die if he participated in the coming operation. He had been told that he would be killed if he ever fell into Allied hands, but he read some psycops leaflets telling about the Chieu Hoi program and quite simply felt that his chances were better if he turned himself in, especially if he had some information that might prove of value to the Allies. He also felt, perhaps, that he would be shown more sympathy if he posed as a forced laborer, which he had in fact been some years before.

A crucial information he gave, however, was that the 9th VC Division and

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elements of the 7th and 1st NVA Divisions would attack Binh Long Province sometime between 5 and 15 August, and the prime objective would be An Loc. The enemy plans that An outlines are depicted on Chart III. Basically he described a regimental-size attack on An Loc, with the 4th and 5th Battalions of the 272nd and the D368 Local Force Battalion providing the three prongs of the main attack force. If, for some reason, the Local Force Battalion would be unable to participate, it would be replaced by the Z28 Sapper Battalion of the 9th Division. The 6th Battalion of the 272nd and the entire 271st Regiment would have the mission of setting up blocking forces to the southwest of An Loc as shown.

An also believed that the four main force enemy divisions would have the following targets: 9th VC Division - An Loc, as stated; 7th NVA Division - Bo Duc, Loc Ninh, and Quan Loi; 1st NVA Division - interdiction of QL 13 to the south of An Loc and operations in Tay Ninh Province with the 5th VC Division.

The interrogators then got An to tell them about the battles that he had participated in over the last five years with the 9th Division. He gave accounts of fighting at Dong Yoai, Loc Ninh, An Loc, Bo Duc, and Tay Ninh, and this provided the intelligence people with a ready credibility check. It was discovered that the information the Hoi Chanh gave about each of these engagements was substantially correct and checked with the other information already known.

The next stop was to reassess some of the recent intelligence of the area to see if there was anything that might substantiate An's story.

It was found that on the 25th of July, B Company, 1-8th Cav, while operating with the 11th ACD, had driven an estimated enemy company out of a bunker complex located generally southwest of An Loc (Circle 1, Chart IV). Documents on enemy bodies and in packs that had been left behind identified the C-18 Anti-aircraft Company of the 101D Regiment, 1st NVA Division.

On 27 July, on the road between An Loc and Loc Ninh, cavalrymen of F Troop, 2-11th ACR killed one NVA and documents on the body identified his unit as the C21 Sapper Recon Company, 209th Regiment, which is part of the 7th NVA Division (Circle 2, Chart IV).

Unit identifications, while conforming to An's story, were not solid

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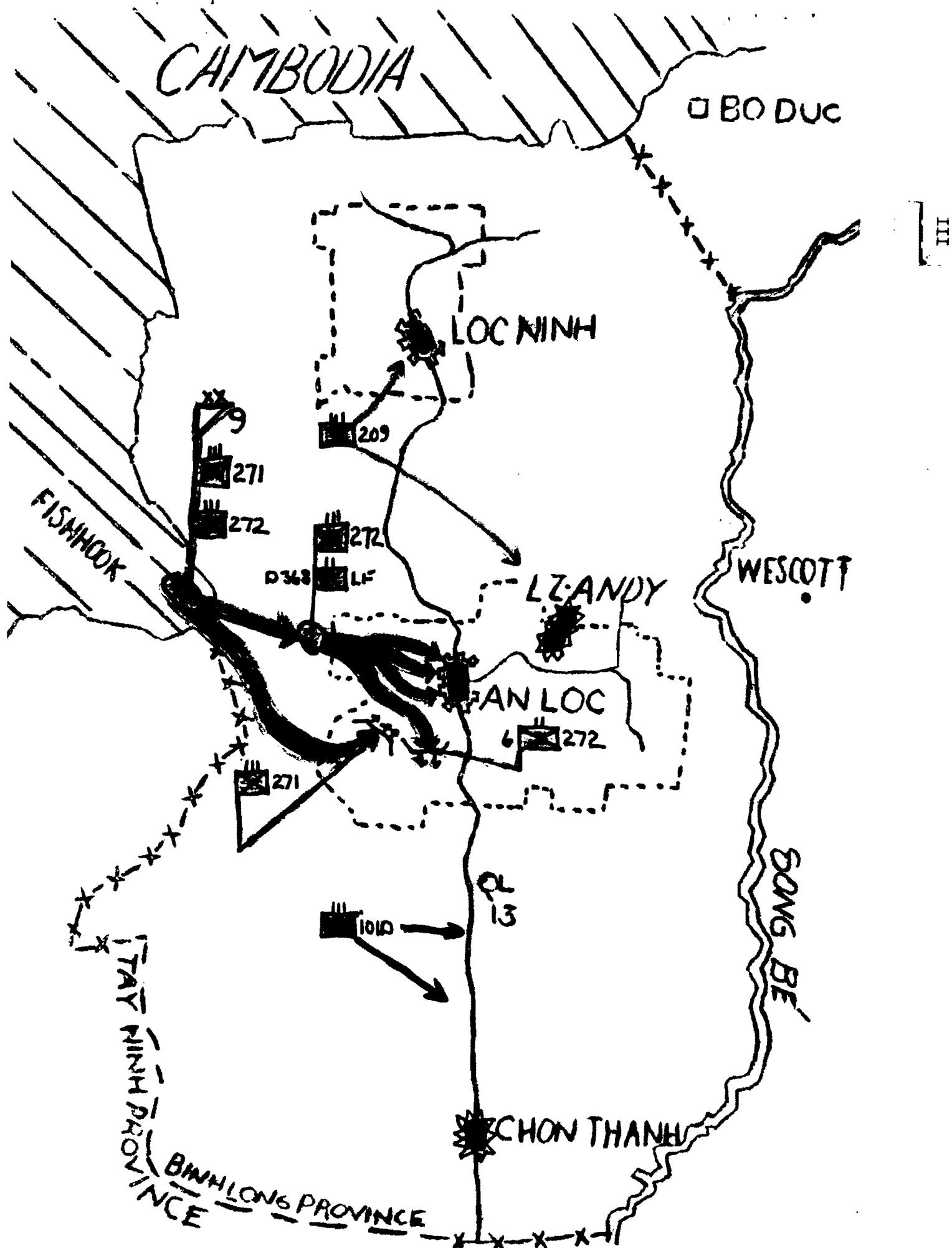


CHART III
The Enemy Plan
(See Appendix I)

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corroboration by any means. It was known that these units were in the vicinity and it was felt that the 101D and 209th Regiments probably had something similar to an Area of Operations boundary running roughly east-west through An Loc. More was needed before much faith could be placed in what An had told his interrogators.

Looking further, however, something slightly more solid was found. On 28 July, C Company, 5-7th Cav, working in the area south-southwest of An Loc (Circle 3, Chart IV) killed two NVA, and documents identified them as belonging to elements of the 271st and 272nd Regiments. At the time of the encounter it was felt that perhaps they were part of a group of hospital patients who had been sent to the 101D, and it was not seen as an indication that these units were in the area. Now, however, with An's story there was at least another possible explanation.

On 1 August, 16 Kilometers east of Loc Ninh (Circle 6, Chart IV), D Company, 1-7th Cav, had killed five NVA in a brilliantly-executed ambush and captured two. One of the PW's said the 7th NVA Division was to hit Quan Loi.

On 2 August, Nguyen Van Sen rallied to the 399th Regional Forces in An Loc and reported that between the 18th and 31st of July two companies of the 9th VC Division were reconnoitering the area east of An Loc (perhaps this was An's group). He also said that about 40 men from D368LF Battalion had moved into the same area on 31 July. This, to, fit in with An's contention that the D368 would participate with 272nd in the attack.

On the next day a PW was brought in who had been wounded in the engagement on 27 July with F/2-11 (Circle 9, Chart IV). He reported that the 209th Regiment was to hit Soc 10, a village in Loc Ninh District, some time between 5 and 7 August.

All this, plus some technological indicators, lent at least some credence to the information that An had given; it was possible that what he had predicted would come about, but that was about all anyone could say for it at this stage. Even the report that on 31 July a Hoi Chanh in Tay Ninh Province claimed that the 9th Division had passed through the vicinity of the Angel's Wing in early July did not definitely refute what favorable evidence there was supporting An. The division could easily have moved the distance from Angel's Wing to the Fishhook in the time then.

Bringing all of this, the 11th ACR completed its analysis of the facts

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surrounding An's story on 3 August and decided that higher headquarters should be informed. The story and background were briefed at FIRST TEAM and II Field Force Headquarters that evening and the reaction at both places was that this was potentially a highly valuable piece of intelligence and one that could not be ignored.

Initially, just the same, there was a considerable amount of healthy skepticism on the First Team staff. Doubters pointed out, in addition to the obvious point that there was, as yet, very little support for the allegation that the 9th Division had moved to the Fishhook, that the plans outlined by An simply did not make sense in many respects. For one thing, his contention that the target for the 5th VC Division would be Tay Ninh was most assuredly incorrect at the time. Its location was known. For another thing, the planned blocking positions reputedly assigned to the 271st Regiment were in rather an unlikely place and orientation. No one could quite figure out just what they would hope to block in that area, and the 271st's positions as drawn out by An cut across the rear of the position he said the battalion from the 272nd would occupy.

Another seeming inconsistency was that, according to An, the D368LF Battalion would operate as a battalion in the center of the main attack on An Loc. If this were true it would be quite a departure from the enemy's normal practice of breaking down local force units and using them as guides for the main force attackers. There was nothing on the D368's record that would seem to justify its selection as an exception.

Perhaps most perturbing of all, however, was the simple fact that An seemed to know TOO much. It is highly unlikely that even a sapper recon platoon leader would know the complete plans of his division and the general objectives of three other divisions. He claimed to know so much that it actually hurt his credibility.

So the issue was very much up in the air. A summary intelligence report published by the First Cav on 4 August has this to say:

There is no other evidence to substantiate the alleged presence of the 9th VC Division in the above-mentioned areas (Binh Long Province and the Fishhook). The last known location prior to the above information was provided by a 16 June Hoi Chanh from the 271st Regiment, who located the 9th Division in the Angel's Wing on the Cambodian - Tay Ninh Province border. SLAR and IR (Sideward Looking Airborne Radar and Infra-Red) activity along the Adam's Road indicates some enemy presence in the area.

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However, these documents (Item 3, Appendix II) may pertain to hospital patients who have been sent to another division, possibly the 101D regiment, 1st NVA Division, which has been operating in the area.

IV. PLANNING AND CONTINUING INTELLIGENCE

While the threat was, thus, by no means clear, planning procedures were initiated at FIRST TEAM Headquarters almost at once. It was felt that as long as there was a possibility that AN was giving an essentially true picture of the enemy's intentions, the First Cav should be prepared to meet the threat if it should materialize, and of course, potentially valuable planning and implementing time was already slipping by.

For the moment forces were shifted west of the Song Be and the Armored Cavalry Squadron at Loc Ninh was reinforced with two rifle companies. This squadron also stepped up Dong Tien operations with the local ARVN forces in hopes of further strengthening the defenses of the area. The 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry shifted an additional company into the rocket-belt area around LZ Andy, conducting a joint operation with its B Company and the Regional Forces from Phu Mieng in the process, and the First Cav's Third Brigade re-evaluated its base defense plans for LZ Andy itself. Plans were also made to send the 1st Battalion, 7th Cav to the Bo Duc-Bu Dop area to establish a jump CP with two of its companies.

Other planning considerations included the possibility of establishing a Division Jump CP at Quan Loi. The FIRST TEAM recognized very quickly the problems of coordination that would occur between the three essentially equal allied forces involved in the defense of Binh Long Province: The Third Brigade, the 11th ACR, and the 9th ARVN Regiment. It was suggested that the ADC-A would be considerably reinforced in his mission of providing this coordination if he were given a staff that could concentrate solely on the area.

Accordingly OPLAN JUMP was formulated. At noon on the 5th of August a planning conference was held with the Headquarters Commandant, G-2, G-3, Artillery and Signal personnel in attendance, plus representatives of the 11th Aviation Group. The following guidance was given: A jump headquarters (Appendix I, Div TAC SOP) ~~be established at Quan Loi on order and satellited to the Third Brigade~~

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with the mission of coordinating the defense of the An Loc/Loc Ninh/Quan Loi complex. The advanced Command Post was to be on one hour notice.

Other planning included a careful assessment of available resources and steps were taken to insure that full use of all pertinent capabilities was made. Psyops personnel started preparing leaflets and tapes for broadcast, and surveillance missions of all types - Scout teams, Sniffer, SLAR, and IR, just to name a few - were concentrated on the Fishhook area. "Hunter-killer" or "Pink" teams focused on the area to the East of the Fishhook and began getting results almost at once. On the 4th, 5th, and 6th of August they killed a total of 25 NVA in three locations (Circles 11 and 12, Chart IV), and surveillance assets began confirming the presence of the enemy in this area. The picture had begun to clarify, and it is fair to say that by the 6th of August the key personnel on the First Cav staff had decided that the general aspects of the threat outlined by An were true.

Requests for B-52 strikes for the area of the Fishhook were submitted. On the 4th, 5th and 6th only two strikes per night were dropped in this region, but with the increased evidence of the presence of the enemy in large groups it was felt that the number of strikes should be increased. Four were submitted for the night of the 7th, increasing to seven each for the nights of 8 and 9 August, and all of these were dropped (Appendix IV). The First Cav, with its excellent targeting and Bomb Damage Assessment (BDA) systems, gets perhaps maximum benefit from this particular brand of "heavy artillery". The results speak for themselves as will be seen from the events following the massive strikes on the 8th and 9th.

V. THE DIVISION ADVANCED COMMAND POST

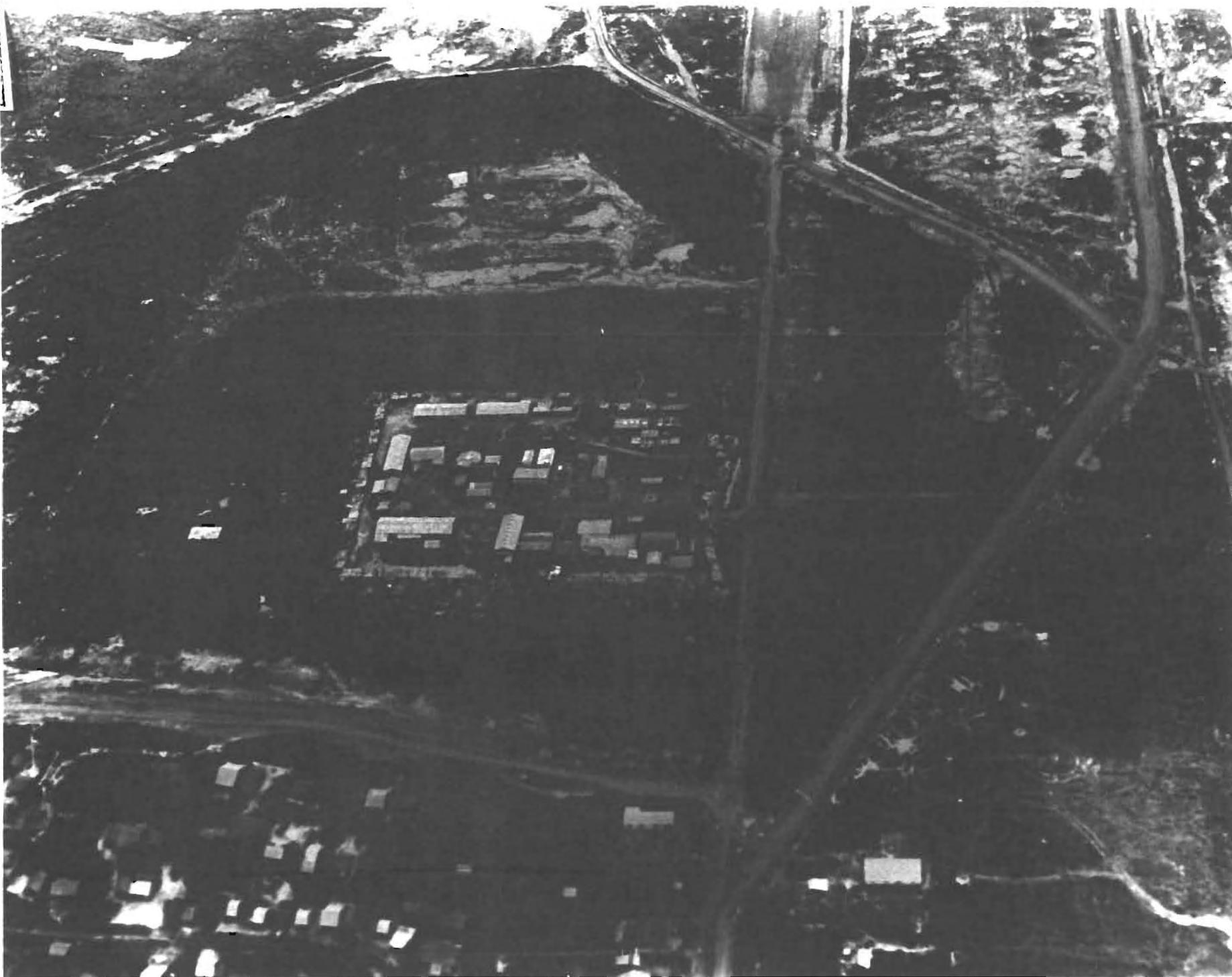
The 7th of August seems to have been decision day in the build-up before the Battle of Binh Long Province; the day when reputations were staked on the value of the available intelligence. As can be plainly seen, the picture was, at that time, by no means clear, there was still no solid corroboration of An's story, and it is easy to appreciate the quality of a unit that sees when a decision has to be made, makes it. When resources are spread thin, it takes courage to commit them to a small area on the basis of imperfect information, but in war, he who waits for "perfect information" never moves.

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At 0912 hours the order was issued to execute OPLAN JUMP. Communications and Artillery personnel left for Quan Loi almost at once, and the rest followed at about 1330 hours. By early afternoon the Division Advanced Command Post, with its complement of 22 men from the main headquarters at Phouc Vinh, was in full operation from the TOC at LZ Andy. It should be emphasized that this was not a command headquarters, but rather a staff group to effect coordination between units. Its mission was to coordinate planning for the defense of the area, including Dong Tien operations, and to provide the First Cav with a command capability closer to the battlefield.

In spite of the problems caused by bleeding key personnel from the Division Headquarters without really giving the Advanced CP an adequate staff, the arrangement must be judged a success. From the moment of its arrival at Quan Loi, the Division Jump CP energized the allied defenses and efficiently coordinated the highly complex defense and counter-attack planning, with an effectiveness that needs to be measured only by the overwhelming success of the operation.

Other major redeployments took place on the 7th. In the morning hours the 1st Squadron, 11th ACR at Loc Ninh lost its two air cav companies, A/5-7 and B/1-8 - the former going to Quan Loi to reinforce the base defense and the latter traveling to Bu Dop to augment the 1-7th's forces in that area. In their place came the 34th ARVN Ranger Battalion and a joint CP was formed and dubbed "Task Force Wright".

On the basis of prior experience in the An Loc area in December 1968 it was decided that an additional armored cav or mechanized battalion was needed, and at 1340 hours on the seventh, the 1st Battalion (Mechanized) of the 16th Infantry for the First Infantry Division was alerted to move to the An Loc area with its A and C Companies. To make a full battalion, A Troop, 1-4 Cav, also from the 1st Division was obtained and went under 1-16 control. The 4th Battalion, 9th ARVN Regiment, in accordance with the Dong Tien program, was teamed with them and the combined force was given responsibility for the area just to the north and west of An Loc.

The flexibility of the FIRST TEAM and its attached units and the decisiveness with which decisions were made and carried out on the seventh of August tribute to all members of the team. As the First Cav is somewhat famous for

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its flexibility and manages to make shifts such as this one often, it is all too easy to forget how much cooperation, decision, and good old-fashioned hard work it takes to bring about such a realignment of forces in such a short period of time. Embellishments and refinements were to come in the days that followed, but the disposition of forces for the defense of Binh Long Province became in a short 24 hours basically what it would be when the attack came.

The arrival of the 1-16th Mech had allowed the 2-11th ACR to concentrate on the area south of An Loc as well as continuing its mission of security of QL 13. Task Force Wright, which had the delicate task of defending Loc Ninh, nestled in its picturesque but tactically dangerous valley surrounded by rubber, now consisted of two battalions. The 1-7th Cav had three companies in the Bu Dop area instead of two, and the base defense at the key installation of Quan Loi had been augmented by a company. The 9th ARVN Regiment, with TF 1-9, concentrated on An Loc itself, and there were ARVN units serving side-by-side with their American allies at all points within the area of operations and at all levels of command. And to coordinate all of this there was now a Division Advanced Command Post at Quan Loi.

An integral part of a good defense plan is a counter-attack plan, and this was by no means ignored. The Jump CP gave this aspect of the preparations its most circumspect attention. Considering the nature of the terrain in the area it was felt that the combination of armor with airmobile units would provide the perfect team for cutting off the withdrawal of the enemy back into his base areas in Cambodia. The concept was to swing the armor around to the west of the enemy in the rubber and back this up with the insertion of airmobile infantry into the areas beyond the rubber where the armor could not operate. All participating units were instructed to prepare detailed counter-attack plans to cover several different contingencies, and to rehearse them (Overlays 3-6, Appendix VII).

The artillery units in the area, both American and ARVN, also prepared their fire support plans in conjunction with the plans of the maneuver units. This was done so effectively, in fact, that when the attack came, all the guns had to do rank on the data already computed and fire (See Appendix V). In the meantime the tactical situation was developing still further. On the

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8th of August at An Loc, Pham Van Do rallied to the ARVN forces. He said that he was from the 8th Battalion, 209th Regiment, and that his unit would cross the Cambodian border, cross the Canle River and attack An Loc from the southwest. There was a good deal of question as the validity of this report, but it still raised the ever-present question of whether the right decision had been made.

On 9 August after the heavy B-52 strikes of the night before, things began to break. At Circle 15 on Chart IV, in the vicinity of the Fishhook, B Troop, 1-9th Cav, an Air Cav Troop, killed 23 NVA who were part of a large force spotted in the open. It was believed that the unit engaged was a part of the 272nd. At 0905 hours that same day the Air Cav Troop (ACT) from the 11th ACR spotted another large group of NVA in a clearing. They engaged the enemy force, killing 33, and this time the identification was more certain: 271st and 101D Regiments (Circle 16, Chart IV).

Still on the 9th, earlier in the morning, at circle 17 on chart IV, a most daring operation took place. The ACT was conducting a BDA of the B-52 strikes of the night before when they spotted a small group of NVA sitting in what appeared to be a stunned state among some bunkers. Two of the OH6A (loach) crews volunteered to take some of the ARP's (Aero Rifle Platoon) into the area to see if they could take any prisoners for questioning. There was really no suitable landing zone in the area, so the loaches had to hover down over one of the bomb craters, pushing the vegetation aside with their propwash, until the infantry could dismount. Six prisoners were taken in this bold venture and they were ferried back to Quan Loi at five men per aircraft in a helicopter that normally has to strain to carry four!

Van Ngiah, one of the PW's, said that he was a member of the 1st Battalion, 101D, and that his battalion base area had been hit by a B-52 strike the night before. He stayed in his bunker all night, and when he came out the following morning he found that only five others were remaining in the area! The PW's taken in this raid were a mixture of supply and administrative personnel, and all of them told of the havoc wrought on their installations by the B-52 strikes. The unit as securing the area was actually the 1st Battalion, 271st, as was learned another prisoner.

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The following day, 10 August, saw another daring raid. Again, while on a BDA mission, helicopters from the 11th ACR spotted an estimated company-size force sitting in a lightly-vegetated area (Circle 18, Chart IV). The loaches got right down in the tops of the trees, not fifteen feet from some of the enemy troops, and they were surprised to see that the men on the ground would look at them and make a show of pushing their weapons aside! When this was reported to the rear, no time was wasted in taking advantage of what was felt to be an opportunity to take a large number of enemy prisoners. Nearly everyone got into the act.

A psyops bird, with a loudspeaker and an interpreter in it, was bounced immediately and flew over the area encouraging the enemy to give up. A smoke grenade was dropped into a clearing and the loudspeaker instructed the NVA soldiers to go to it and they would be picked up. One came out after about 15 minutes, was extracted, and the interpreter continued to urge more to come out.

While this was going on, troops were being moved into the area. The lightly-vegetated area the enemy had been spotted in was enclosed by clearings on the east and west with the narrower gap between the clearings on the south. The hastily-devised plan was to put the ARP's from the 11th ACR across this southern gap, and insert a company from the 4-9th ARVN's in true Dong Tien spirit with a platoon from Company C, 1-16th Mech, and the "blues" from B/1-9 across the vegetated area of the north.

While this was being done another two enemy soldiers responded to the loudspeaker and were picked up. They indicated under hasty questioning that there were "hard Core" individuals among those remaining that would probably not allow any more to come out.

And sure enough, shortly after all the ground troops were in place, a few of the enemy engaged the ARP's on the right flank, wounding two and leaving the allies with no recourse but to open fire. ARA (Aerial Rocket Artillery) and tube artillery were called in and when the smoke cleared there were 31 enemy dead and five additional detainees (Four of which were classified as PW's), and there were no further friendly casualties. Apparently the group was fresh from a hospital in Cambodia (two of the PW's were medics, one of them medical training cadre),

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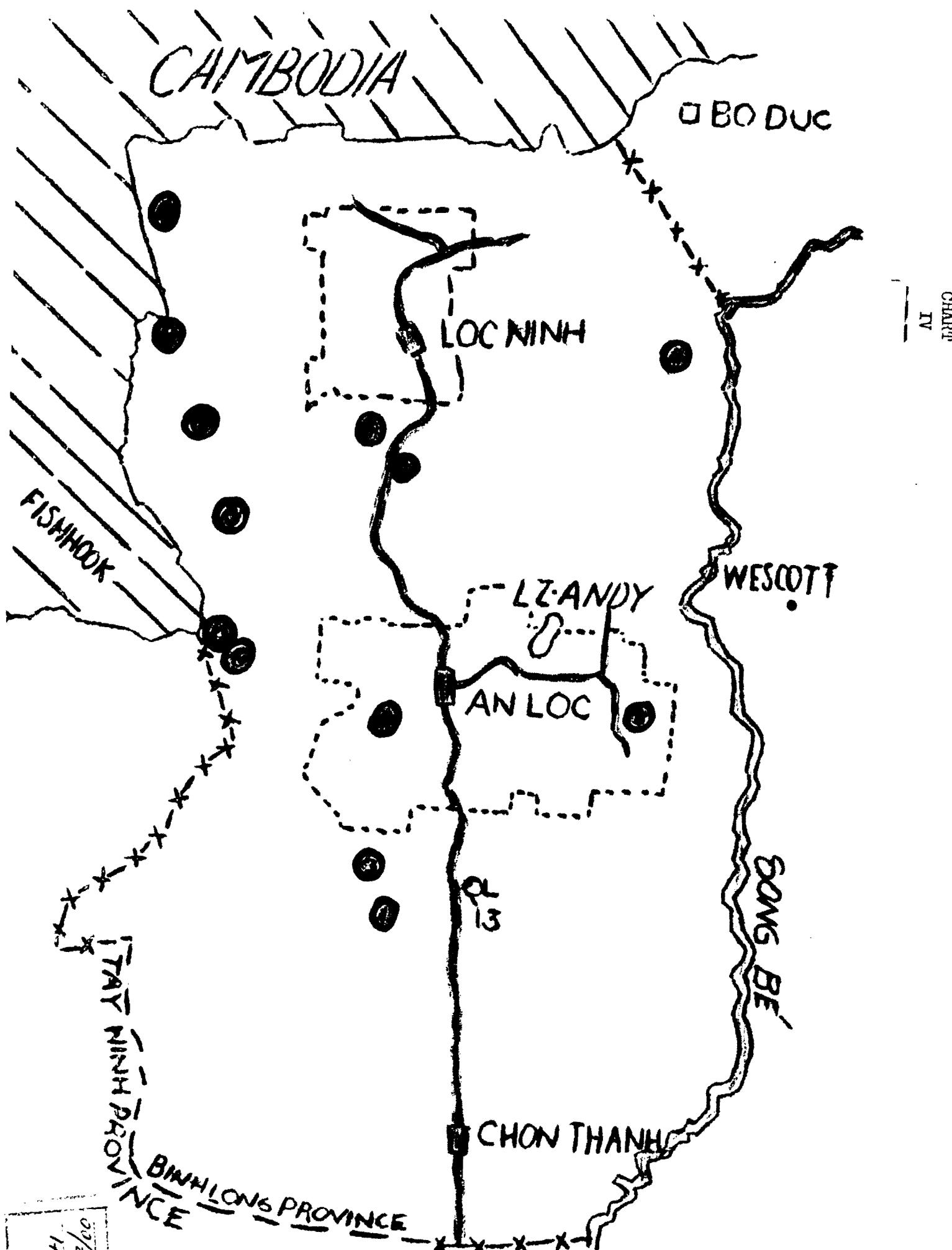


CHART IV

Intelligence Build-up (See Appendix II)

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and they were carrying 120mm mortar rounds to an artillery unit supporting the 272nd; the "hard core" individuals were from the 272nd.

This engagement was a forerunner of what was to come. ARVN's and Americans, troops from the First Cav, the First Infantry Division, and the 11th ACR worked together in perfect harmony in the accomplishment of a stunning, if small-scale victory. Swift and decisive execution and maximum use of resources were also characteristics that were to be seen later, and the total impression is that this relatively small operation was a microcosm of the resounding defeat the enemy was to suffer at allied hands two days later. It could also be said to be the high-point of Dong Tien operations that preceded the actual battle, as the ARVN's carried more than their share of the fight.

By the 10th of August, then, it was becoming clear that the decisions of the 7th had been sound. Hoi Chanh An's story had been substantiated as far as units and their orientation were concerned, but this did not mean that the defenders were to fall into the trap of meeting only the challenges outlined in the plans he gave them. Defense and counter-attack by elements of the 9th, 7th, and 1st enemy divisions on the province of Binh Long. A total of 14 landing zones had been selected and reconnoitered for the insertion of airmobile infantry into blocking positions, and the 11th ACR mapped out several counter-attack routes for its three task forces to become acquainted with (Detailed overlays of these plans should be looked at in Appendix VII). Rehearsals and practice alerts were held. Further, forces had been deployed so that they provided maximum coverage and swift reaction to any threat that might develop. The highly mobile forces of the 11th ACR were never so far away from QL 13 that they could not provide quick and strong assistance to any point along its route, maintaining the advantage of interior lines mentioned before. Infantry units were set out in small, mutually-supporting elements in a classical COPL-type role, where they had merely to orient to the rear to provide close-in blocking forces in the way of enemy egress. And, perhaps most important, allied forces were present in sufficient strength to cover the terrain and meet even the strongest enemy challenge, which is precisely

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what they got.

VI. THE LULL AND THEN THE DELUGE

After the crescendo of activity building up to the 10th, the quietness of the 11th stood out like a warning flag. Simply nothing happened. Surveillance aircraft of all descriptions were out, and they found very little. Known enemy radio nets were silent. Some 129 enemy soldiers had been killed in the province by the elements of the First Cav. and the 11th ACR in just the action that related to the intelligence build-up in the past ten days and on the 11th there were no contacts. The enemy was in position and he was ready to strike; fortunately this is the way the lull was interpreted.

Final changes were made on the 11th. A Troop, 1-4th Cav was moved to the rubber south of Quan Loi in an economy-of-force measure, being replaced at Task Force 1-16 by D Company, 5-7th Cav.

Psyops swung into its final phase of the operation by dropping its leaflets and making the Loudspeaker broadcasts prepared several days before. Copies of the leaflets are included in Appendix VI. These were dropped along the most likely routes the enemy would follow, and they told the enemy soldier that we knew his plans and had quite a surprise waiting for him. The design, rather clearly, was to undermine his confidence in his leaders and reduce his willingness to fight, and in the fighting that was to follow there was considerable evidence that this approach had had its effect in the large number of prisoners that were taken.

The final disposition of forces can be seen in greater detail in overlay 2 of Appendix VII, but the general breakdown is shown on charts V and Va. TF Wright was at Loc Ninh and FSB Jon, TF 1-16 was divided between LZ Allons II and Thunder IV with the ARVN's in advanced positions further to the west. The 2nd Squadron, 11th ACR was at Aspen and the 15th ARVN Cav with 1-9th ARVN Infantry was at nearby Sidewinder, both units having companies and platoons deployed throughout the general area. Elements of two battalions of the 9th ARVN Regiment provided close-in security at An Loc, and the 2-1st ARVN Cav was at Chon Thanh. The Third bri- of the First Cav had two air Cav companies on LZ Andy, one as base

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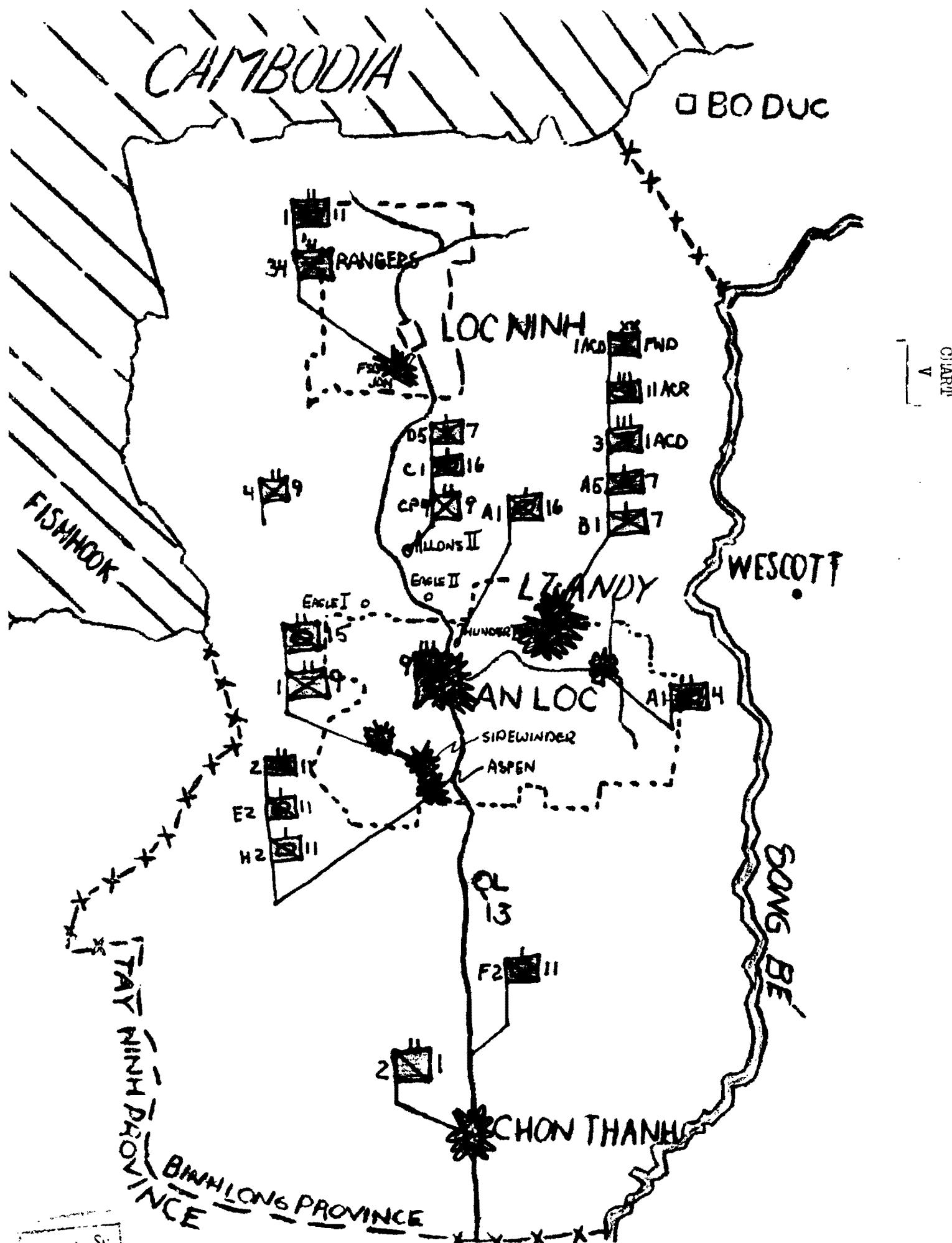


CHART VI

DISPOSITION OF FORCES. 1900 HRS 11 AUGUST

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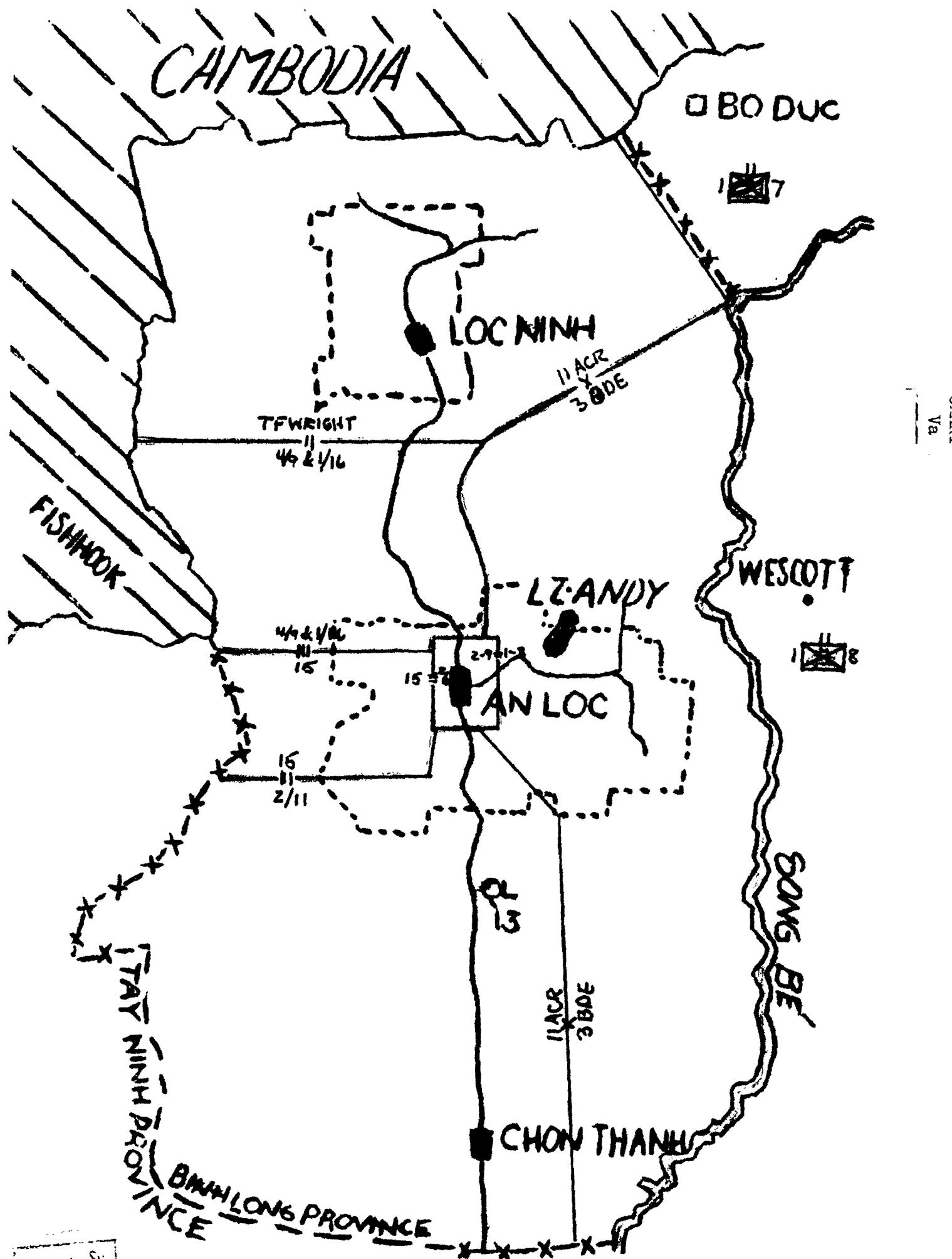


CHART IV a

Disposition of Forces 111900 August
(See Overlay 2 Appendix VII)

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defense and one as a Ready Reaction Force (RRF), and three companies - two air cav and one armored cav - deployed as early warning and screening forces around the periphery. All units were alert as night fell; all units were ready.

It is a good thing that they were, as when the attack came, it came with a suddenness and ferocity seldom seen before. At 0045 hours, the 12th of August had barely gotten under way when Chon Thanh took the first blow. Hit by a 100-120-man force and incoming mortars, the troopers of the 2-1st ARVN Cav dug their heels in and fought the enemy back, with the help of two spookies. F Troop, 2-11th ACR, from its position 4.5 kilometers to the north along QL 13, came sweeping down the road to the southwest end of the Chon Thanh airstrip for added security. Two NVA prisoners were taken by the ARVN's, and their unit was established as the 101D Regiment. Left behind when the enemy withdrew were nine of their number.

Twenty minutes later, at 0105 hours, what was to be the most crucial engagement of the enemy campaign began when Quan Loi started taking incoming mortars and B-40's, and very shortly after it was discovered that the enemy was inside the wire on the western side of the LZ. He eventually broke through at a total of three locations, the other two being on the eastern side, and sharp fighting raged both inside and outside the perimeter all night. The enemy was denied a significant penetration, however, with the heroism and valor on the part of Third Brigade Troopers. Mopping-up operations to eliminate the enemy that had gotten inside the wire continued until after dawn, with three sappers getting to within 100 meters of the TOC before they were stopped by a small force of medics. All available means of support were employed: ARA, Spooky and Shadow aircraft, direct fire from the artillery on Andy itself supporting fires from nearby firebases. Gallant and courageous fighting by clerks, cooks, and mechanics and acts of unusual resourcefulness and bravery soon stabilized a potentially dangerous situation, and the enemy's main effort in the campaign was beaten. Seven Americans lost their lives in this fighting, one of them the aircraft commander of a Cobra gunship that took a direct hit from a 107mm rocket, but over 55 enemy dead were left behind and 7 prisoners were taken. (For a detailed account of the fight at LZ Andy, see

II of this report).

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A great part of the credit for the successful defense of Quan Loi must also go to the second platoon of A/1-4 Cav, which, in its screening position 2 kilometers to the south of the LZ, sustained a ferociously heavy ground attack beginning at about 0115 hours. Engaging an enemy force of battalion size for two hours without support of any kind (communications had gone out in the initial burst of fire) this one platoon in all probability stopped the enemy main attack from reaching the gaps in the wire on the eastern side of Quan Loi in time. An unidentified helicopter finally helped the platoon contact their troop commander and the rest of the troop reinforced them at about 0315 hours, at which point ammunition was so low in the second platoon that they figured they were only 30 minutes from being over-run. When ARA's "Blue Max" showed up, however, the shoe was on the other foot, and the enemy quickly left the scene, his morning-report strength decreased by 38, while the "Quarterhorse" lost two.

Between 0120 and 0210 hours incoming mortars and rockets were received at the following locations: 0120 - An Loc, 0135 - Sidewinder, 0140 - Aspen and Phu Mieng, 0150 - An Loc again, along with villages to the northwest, and 0210 - Loc Ninh.

At 0210 hours, D Company, 1-11th ACR, in its position north of the air-strip at Loc Ninh, started taking RPG's (Rocket Propelled Grenades) and at the same time FSB Jon received small-arms and B-40 fire from the southwest. A joint ARVN-US ambush was sent out and made contact with an estimated 40-man enemy force. The encounter was brief, the enemy seeming to be most interested in leaving the area, but 12 NVA were killed before this was accomplished.

D Company, meanwhile, was still taking RPG's in its location and soon had two tanks burning, with one soldier trapped in the cupola of his flaming vehicle. At 0345 hours, C Troop and a part of the 1st Company, 34th ARVN Rangers were sent to reinforce them and the situation soon stabilized. In this action the 34th Rangers distinguished themselves with some of the most aggressive fighting of the night. Their company commander was awarded the Silver Star for killing seven of the enemy with his .45 caliber pistol; he shot six and clubbed the seventh. Enemy losses in this fight with D Company and its reinforcement units were

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19 KIA, all from the 209th Regiment.

At 0227 hours, Aspen reported that it was receiving a heavy ground probe accompanied by incoming. The effective volume of firepower put out by the elements of the 2-11th ACR, with help from Spooky, was so great that the enemy attack could not be long sustained, and the NVA retired from the field shortly after 0300 hours leaving behind 32 of their dead and 2 PW's who said they were from the K2 Battalion, 271st Regiment.

Bare minutes after the attack at Aspen started, at about 0241 hours, the 15th ARVN Armored Cav and their infantry unit at Sidewinder reported that they too were under attack from the east and northeast. The ARVN's had not moved into position until after 1700 hours the afternoon before and had not therefore, had sufficient time to prepare their defenses adequately. Still, they fought as best they could with what they had and made the enemy pay dearly for every inch of ground. The NVA had gotten in the wire by 0305 and had broken in the northeastern side of the perimeter. Spooky and ARA arrived quickly on the scene and provided most valuable support

At this time E Troop, 2-11th ACR, which was in position at Aspen with platoon-size advanced positions along QL 13 in the rubber, was ordered to move to Sidewinder in support of the ARVN's. The enemy had already made a penetration of part of the perimeter when E Troop was notified, so they did not waste any time. The situation was quite tense for the next 40 minutes.

One of E Troops tracks, while hurriedly moving to Sidewinder, hit a mine just 600 meters to the south of their destination, and two platoons were held at this location as a reaction force while the first platoon swept around to the northern side of the LZ. This platoon had to fight its way through, but it quickly closed the gap, rolling its tracks up on the berm at about 0400 hours, a bare 40 minutes from the time they were first alerted to move. The remainder of the troop closed on the LZ at 0420 hours and the situation stabilized, relieving the pressure on the beleaguered defenders. Reaction in support had been speedy and forceful, Sidewinder had not been lost, and the 78 dead that the NVA lost (plus 3 PW's and

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LZ SIDEWINDER, AUGUST 1969

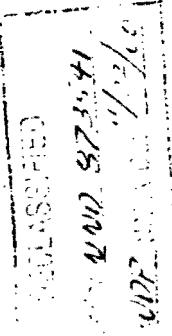
4 Hoi Chanh's) was quite a heavy toll. When dawn came the ground was in allied hands and a company of the 2-9th ARVN's had arrived in support from Chon Thanh along QL 13.

Sidewinder was the last of the ground attacks that night, and only sporadic mortar attacks on An Loc and the surrounding villages filled the time until dawn.

It had been quite a night. In the space of less than two hours, from the time of the first attack on Chon Thanh at 0045 hours until the attack began in earnest on Sidewinder at 0241, the enemy launched major ground attacks, involving units of three main-force divisions, at six different points over the entire length of Binh Long Province. It was a challenge of unusual scope and ferocity, the first time the enemy has been able to mount such a coordinated effort on such a scale. Indeed, there were those who would have thought it was beyond his capability to coordinate the actions of so many units over so much terrain. Yet he did it, and the allied forces were not caught off guard. With teamwork of the highest order ARVN's along with troops from the Big Red One, the 11th ACR, and the division so appropriately called the FIRST TLAM all worked together without a hitch to deny the enemy all of his objectives. He did not succeed in any of his ventures.

The use of available resources must also come in for its due. From the moment the enemy arrived in the province he was harried; he was hit and terrified by B-52 strikes, chased and killed by hunter-killer teams, pounded with hundreds of rounds of artillery whenever he was picked up by surveillance means, and his mind was worked on by psyops, which played on his fears so effectively that a total of 29 PW's and Hoi Chanh's fell into allied hands during the fighting. And when he attacked, the enemy found himself pitted not only against the massive firepower of allied ground units, but also section after section of ARA (74 sorties, 758 rockets, 22,650 rounds mini-gun, and 1,400 40mm cannon rounds), Spooky and Shadow birds, and over 5,000 rounds of artillery of every caliber and type (Appendix V).

Further, the deployment of the allied forces was such that at no location was the enemy able to win his point; where he could not be stopped with what was available, additional support had been positioned so that it reached the fight in time. All sections of the Area of Operations saw deployment of troops in support



at night at one time or other, a difficult thing to do under the best conditions. At Chon Thanh, F/2-11 was moved; at Quan Loi all three reaction forces were deployed and the Ready Reaction Force company utilized. At Loc Ninh, C/1-11 and part of 1-34 Rangers moved to support D Company when it was in trouble, and south of Quan Loi the second and third platoons of A/1-4 Cav, despite communications difficulties, made it in time to save the second platoon. Finally, in the most spectacular case, E/2-11th ACR quite possibly arrived just in time at Sidewinder to save the brave souls there who had stood their ground. All the time there was reserve power, as well, in the form of the two companies of 1-16th Mech and D/5-7, sitting, waiting along QL 13, ready to go where ever they might be needed.

The challenge exceeded all expectations, but it was met, and met with a vengeance!

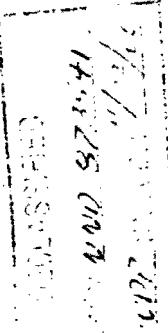
VII. COUNTER-ATTACK

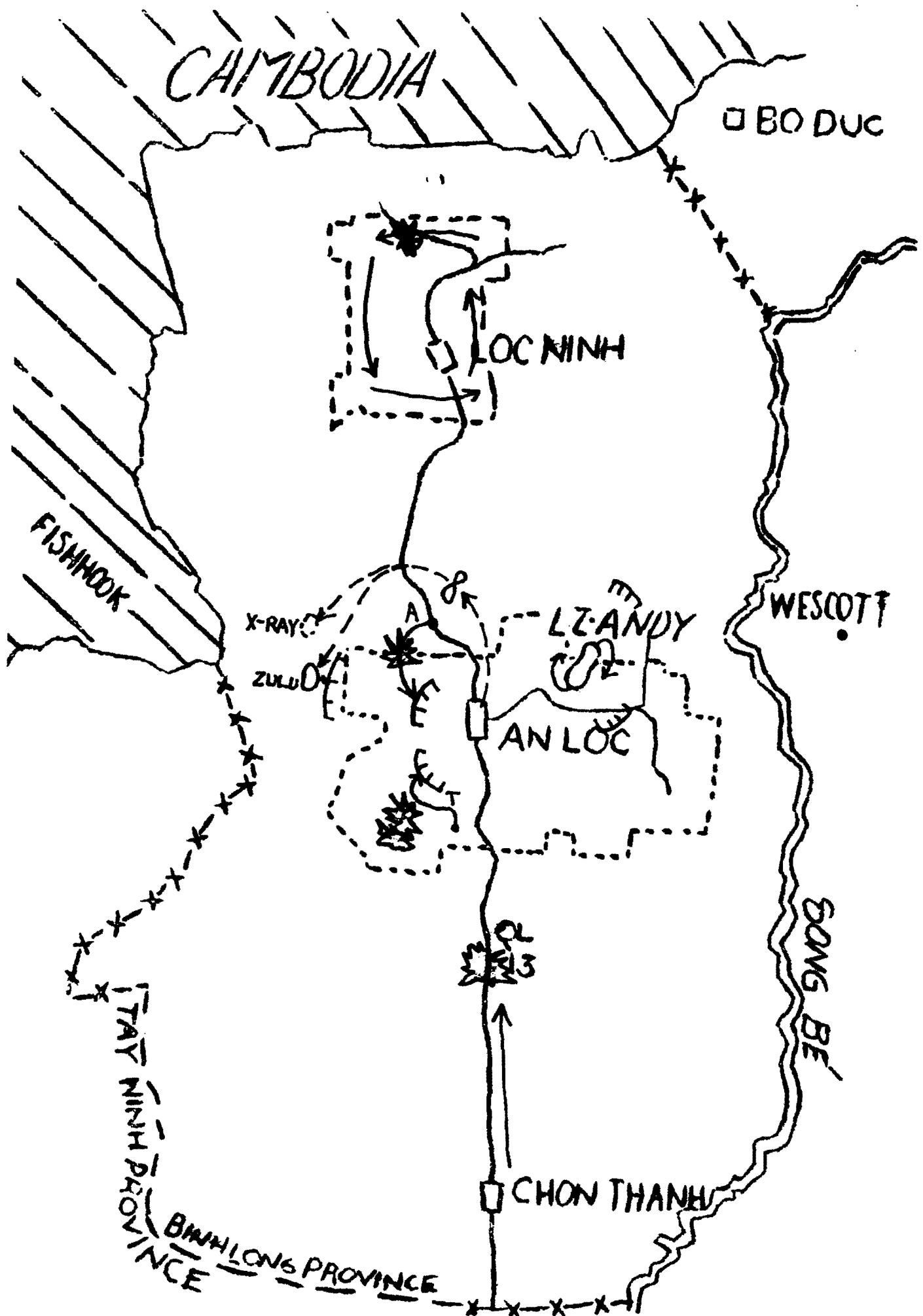
Hard fighting, however, was still to come. Early in the morning of the 12th of August the order came to execute the counter-attack plan (Chart VI). The 11th ACR, considering the nature and locations of the attacks during the night, selected routes "T" for the 2-11th and "A" for the 1-16th Mech in the An Loc area and gave a general sweeping mission to TF Wright in the Loc Ninh area due to the relatively light nature of their contact the preceding night (Overlay 3, Appendix VII).

Landing zones "x-ray" and "zulu" were selected for the insertion of the three airmobile companies to block outside the western limit of the armor's reach. The companies in the vicinity of Quan Loi were to reorient to the rear in an attempt to block any enemy attempting to leave the area, and the RRF Company conducted a close-in sweep around the LZ. All the while aerial surveillance would be kept at a maximum level to capitalize on the enemy's need to move during the daylight hours.

Things had hardly gotten under way when, at 0645 hours, Blue Max's Cobras spotted an enemy force evading between An Loc and Quan Loi. They killed eight of the NVA and speeded up the rate of evasion a little for the remainder.

The elements of TF 1-11 were the first to get rolling, and by 0745 hours, A and C Companies, reinforced by D/5-7th Cav, had married up, moved out along





Counter-Attack

CHART VI

(See Overlays 3-6, Appendix VII)

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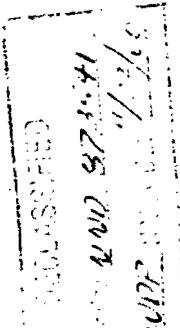
their route "A", and come in contact with an unknown-size enemy force just to the east of Eagle II. They hammered the tired and beaten enemy with fire and maneuver, corralling him between the companies and killing 29 of them in a crisp and vicious fight. The combined might of armor and infantry in quick reaction to the opportunities of the situation no doubt made the enemy wish he had stayed in Cambodia. (For a detailed account, see Part IV).

E Troop, 2-11th ACR was satisfied that the situation at Sidewinder was stable by 0700 hours and was able to move out along their route "T" to execute their portion of the counter-attack plan. H Company was to follow up in support if needed.

At 0810 hours, B Troop, 1-9th Cav helicopter, as a part of the aerial counter-attack, engaged an enemy force evading in the vicinity of LZ Andy. They reported killing six and having T-55 Roi Chanks, but nothing further was ever seen of the latter.

Continuing the aerial interdiction, at 0825 hours a Pink team from C/1-9 received ground fire southeast of Nui Loi. They returned fire and killed two NVA. A Third Brigade LNO, Lt Tom Brennan, stationed on Nui Ba Ra at the relay station, was listening to the enemy radio net with his interpreter during this incident. The enemy commander, upon hearing the choppers in the distance, passed the word to his subordinate leaders over the radio to be sure that none of the troops fired at the helicopters. He repeated it for emphasis: "Make damn sure that no one fires at those helicopters." Well, the famous two-percent failed to get the word, and there were scenes of hilarity on Nui Ba Ra as one very angry NVA Commander raged over the radio, "I thought I told you not to fire at those ---- helicopters! Now you've done it, we're going to have to get the ---- out of here FAST!" Apparently two of them were not quite fast enough, and it is doubtful if justice arranged for either of them to be the one that caused the whole thing by taking a pot-shot at a Cobra.

At 0828 hours another phase of the counter-attack operation swung into action with the beginning of the combat assault of A and B Companies, 1-5th and A com-

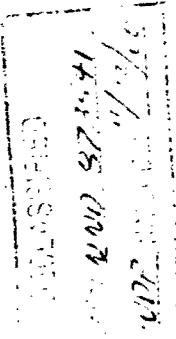


pany, 2-5th into landing zone "zulu" ("x-ray" being unsuitable because of weather in that area). These companies were extracted from Phuoc Vinh and LZ Mary and airlifted to LZ Shirley (An Loc) from which they made their assault. By 1120 hours all three companies were complete in the objective area and moving overland to increase the breadth of their blocking force. The plans also included provisions for moving D/1-7 with B Battery, 1-21 Artillery into a hasty firebase in the vicinity of LZ Eagle I before dark so that the companies in the blocking positions could have the faster support provided by 105mm howitzers. This move was complete by 1900 hours.

Hunter-killer teams kept continuous pressure on the enemy throughout the morning, and at 0840 hours a pink team from B/1-9, working northwest of Loc Ninh, spotted another evading enemy force. The Cobras rolled in hot and killed nine.

A little later, at 1005 hours, A/1-11 ACR, operating with the 4-34 ARVN Rangers 7 kilometers north of Loc Ninh, caught a small enemy force moving to the north. The Rangers dismounted and together with the tankers they accounted for 7 enemy dead.

While all of this was going on, E Troop, 2-11th ACR had reached its objective area at the end of its route "T" without incident and had broken down into platoons to search the general area for the enemy. The third platoon ran into light contact to the south, and the troop commander committed his whole force to develop the situation. At 1210 hours, he found himself embroiled in extremely heavy fighting with one of the battalions of the 271st. The contact raged for several hours, during which time a total of four air strikes and over 300 rounds of artillery were pounded into one grid square. Both forces used the rubber for all the advantages each could get out of it, and a heavy toll was exacted: 31 enemy killed by small-arms, 12 killed by artillery, and 13 killed by helicopter, while E troop lost 2 killed, 4 missing (one of which is now in an NLF hospital), and 36 wounded. Another one of the missing, a Lt Hudkin, was found three days later, on the 15th, badly wounded but still alive. He had bandaged his own wounds and driven his track to the edge of the rubber where he was spotted by helicopters and picked up. He



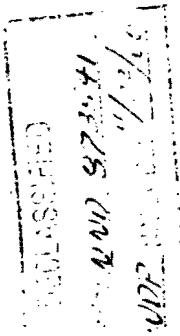
was in pretty bad shape, as one can imagine, having been left for dead three days before, but he had enough energy left to ask his rescuers if he could please have a coke!

H Company, in the meantime, had been sent at 1330 hours to reinforce E Troop, but before they reached their destination, the tankers encountered an enemy force of their own to the south of E Troop's location. While sustaining one US KIA, the company accounted for another 29 enemy dead.

Seemingly quite incidental to these operations which were all a part of the counter-attack plan, but yet consistent with what An had predicted, F Troop, 2-11th ACR was minding its business escorting a convoy along QL 13 when it was ambushed by a large enemy force. The enemy, however, had been unwise enough to have chosen a site that had been used many times before for ambushes, and it was very little time before F Troop and the ARVN's that were with the convoy turned the tables. This engagement cost the 101D Regiment another 50 dead, which, at this point it could ill-afford.

This was the last large contact of the 12th, and it marked the end, for all intents and purposes, of the Battle of Binh Long Province. The FIRST TEAM continued to chase and harass the enemy, of course, killing some 230 NVA in the three days following the 12th, and the enemy had enough left in him for one last, poorly-executed attack on the hasty firebase occupied by D/1-7th on the morning of the 14th, but for both sides this was only an aftermath. The bloody thirteen hours following the attack on Chon Thanh, during which the enemy first executed his plans against the allies and then the allies executed their plans against the enemy, constitute the heart of the battle. These hours were the last for some 460 NVA soldiers who were unfortunate enough to have been on the receiving end of one of the most beautifully planned and executed operations of the Vietnam war.

On the other side of the ledger 20 American men lost their lives during this fighting. For them the fact that they are the short part of a 23-to-1 kill ratio will be little solace, but history sometimes has a way of rewarding those who die in battle, and perhaps she will be especially kind to these twenty for having been



the cutting-edge of such a brilliant operation.

VIII. ASSESSMENT

In the heat of battle one hardly has time to stop and think about how well things might be going. In a struggle for survival, valuations are reduced to a simple standard: good is alive, bad is dead or wounded. Then too, nearly everyone was simply too busy and too involved to allow the luxury of such reflection. The only thing that was really clear was that there was a hell of a fight going on.

To the trooper who has lost a buddy no amount of figures will be able to make it appear that the battle was a success. For all of us the carnage and wreckage of a bitterly-contested battleground is not the atmosphere for exultation, even if the carnage all belongs to the other side. No matter who you are, you cannot help but see mothers and wives in the face of a dead enemy.

And the natural confusion that is bound to exist when so much happens in such a short period of time obscured for a while the great measure of the success. Gradually, however, in the days after 12 August the picture emerged.

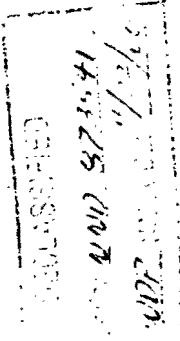
It was found that An's predictions had been substantially correct with minor variations. Bo Duc did not get hit, and the 271st along with the K4 Sapper Battalion, 16th Armor Office (directly under the control of COSVN) hit Quan Loi instead of elements of the 7th NVA Division. The enemy did not attack An Loc itself, but seemed instead to key on the allied units and installations in the vicinity, although someone did report seeing VC handing out propaganda leaflets at the West Gate of the province capital. This could have been part of the D368LF Battalion, which An had predicted would participate, but in a vastly different role than as a main-force battalion centering a regimental-size attack.

On the other hand the 271st was found roughly in the area An indicated, and it was the 209th that attacked Loc Ninh while the 101D Regiment concentrated on the south and QL 13. The general thrust of An's story was enough to go on, and all that it would have been prudent to plan on. An was, after all, only a platoon leader but at the same time a very intelligent young man. The plan he outlined was in all probability something he had pieced together for himself from the bits

of information that he had and perhaps rumors that he had heard - close, but not completely correct.

There is also the possibility that what he told his interrogators was actually the plan at one time, but the enemy had plenty of time before the 29th, when they discovered that he was gone, to make alterations. Or possibly their observers in the area kept them informed of the build-up of allied forces in the province in the days before the 12th and this forced them to try and cripple US and ARVN fighting strength before attempting anything else. If this was the case, he failed miserably and the allies can take considerable pride in the fact that the NVA was either unwilling or unable to try anything further after their losses on the 12th. There was no second wave of attacks or really any offensive ventures of any importance attempted by the enemy subsequently.

Whether this is the reason or something else for the divergence between the plans given by An and what actually happened, his warning was sufficient for the allies and plans were formulated flexibly enough to meet any one of a number of variations on the general theme. The story of the Battle of Binh Long Province reads like a book solution - intelligence leading to planning and planning honed to a fine edge, followed by violent and vastly capable execution. Every ounce of possible benefit was derived from all available resources, and the First Cavalry Division and its attached units, fighting side-by-side with the ARVN's showed in all aspects of the operation a technical proficiency and fighting tenacity that has added a measure to the great tradition of the American Fighting Man. And the teamwork which so markedly characterized every aspect of the campaign shows what can be done when professional soldiers of all arms and two nations work together with one thing in mind: the mission.



APPENDIX I

PART II

Chronology of events at LZ Andy, 12 August 1969.

0109: Incoming in the 6-27th area. 3 minutes later, ground probe reported with individuals in the wire; at the same time, B-40, RPG and small-arms fire received. Blue Max came on station and reported taking fire.

0140: Second probe reported on SE side of LZ Andy at bunker 61; breach of wire occurred at this point.

0205: Shadow on station.

0214: Build-up reported at N end LZ.

0222: Bunker 15 reports taking heavy RPG and SA fire.

0230: Green line quiet.

0238: Bunkers 67 and 68 receive probe.

0313: Bunker 2 reports individual in wire, and bunker 62 reports taking AK fire from the rear.

0358: More incoming, approximately 10x107mm rockets. One round hits log bird (UH-1H) on 1-8 log pad. Cobra hit on runway.

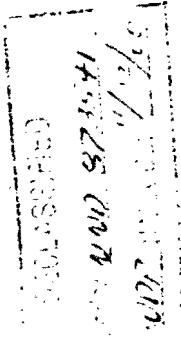
0410: 1 US KIA, and 23 WIA at LZ Andy.

0556: Reports from 11th ACR stating that their rifle platoon received sniper fire in the vicinity of the PX (French Village).

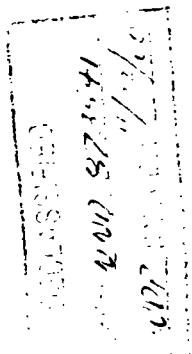
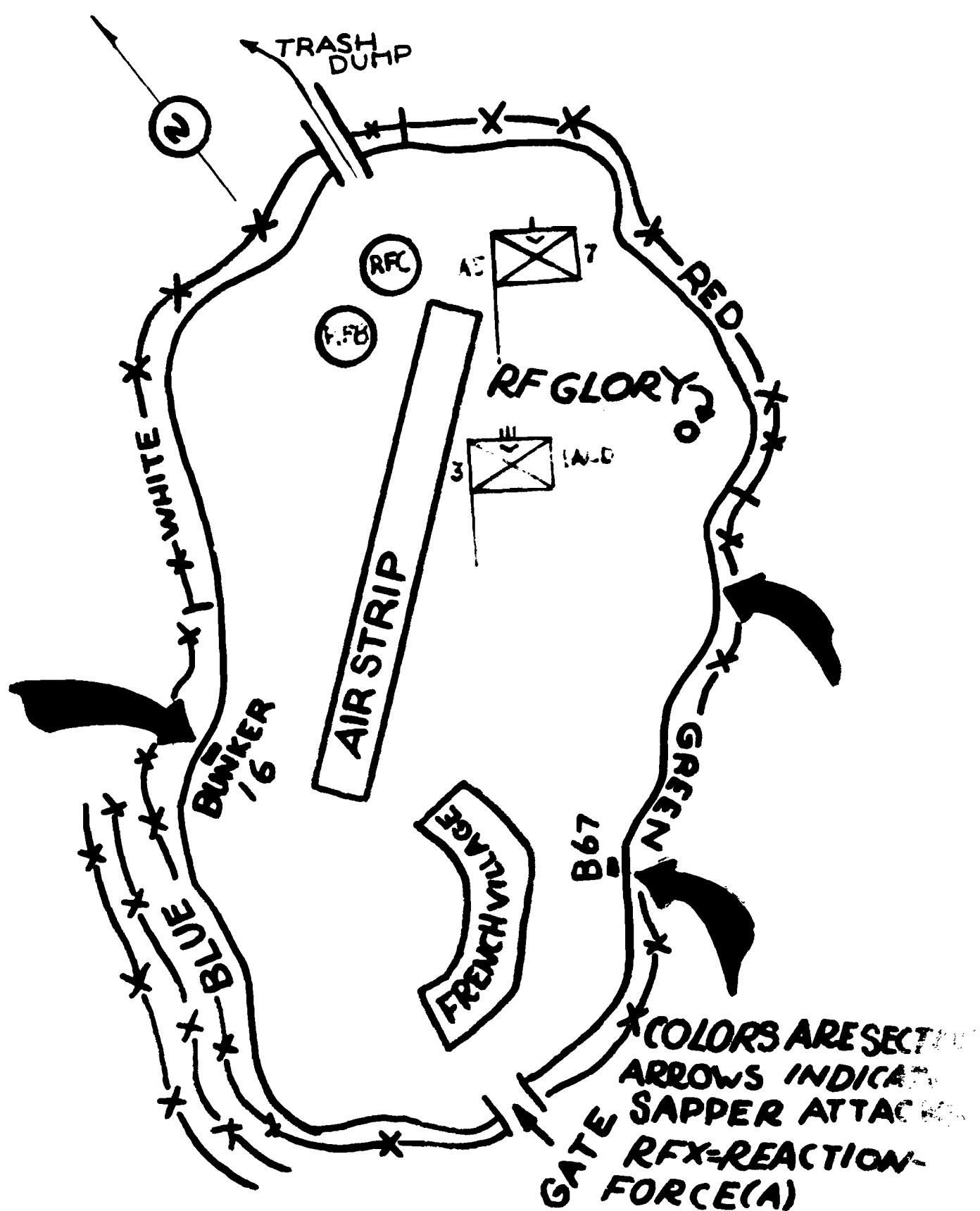
0630: Bunkers 16 and 17 reported receiving SA fire, and 3 PW were reported at bunkers 16 and 17. A platoon of A/5-7 and RFB were dispatched to the area.

0651: Sniper fire reported in the 2nd FSE area.

NOTE: The above is by no means a complete chronology, but is an extract from the Third Brigade log for the period.



(Z ANDY (QUAN LOI))

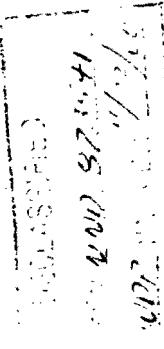


PART II: THE FIGHT FOR LZ ANDY (QUAN LOI)

LZ Andy, also known as Quan Loi from the name of the village just outside the base, is the key military installation in Binh Long Province. The Brigade Headquarters of the 3d Brigade of the First Cav is located there along with the regimental CP of the 11th ACR, and Four of the First Team's Battalions plus two of the 11th ACR's squadrons have their rear areas clustered around the 3d Brigade's TOC in the rubber trees on the south side of the runway. The airstrip itself is a hard-surface affair capable of handling C-130 aircraft with ease, and there are fueling, re-arming, and maintenance facilities for all varieties of rotary-wing aircraft.

Andy is also the firing base for two tube of 175mm and 2 tubes of 8-inch artillery from A Battery, 6th Bn, 27th Artillery, and six 155mm guns from F Battery of the 16th Artillery. Augmenting this are three 4.2-inch mortars from F Troop, 2nd Squadron of the 11th ACR. It is, thus, a military base of much importance with a wide range of operational capabilities, and one would imagine that an enemy with the mission of securing the population centers of the province would have to strike here first, in an attempt to at least incapacitate its military operation.

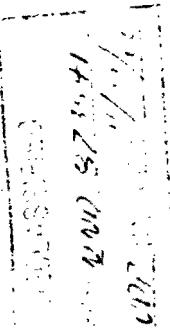
The base itself sprawls over the crest of a large flat-topped hill some 3 kilometers long and 1.5 kilometers wide, and this occupies some fairly good defensive terrain. The drawback, however, is that it is perhaps too big. A drive around the inside perimeter wire will take roughly 9 kilometers, and without holding an excessive number of ground troops back to defend it, available resources are going to be spread pretty thin covering the 82 bunkers and nine towers that comprise the perimeter. A rifle company, for example, manning a firebase, will normally have anywhere from 14 to 18 bunkers to cover; but the company that is assigned the mission of defending the "green" sector at Andy



finds itself responsible for thirty! In a 100-man company, this leaves three men per bunker, which is the minimum called for in the Base Defense SOP, in over two-thirds of the sector. If one man in a three-man bunker should be wounded, one of the other two may have to take care of him, leaving only one man actually firing.

This, of course, was recognized by the Third Brigade defenders and economy-of-force measures were sought to insure that the base was adequately defended. A "mobile" defense (as opposed to a cordon defense) concept was developed with three echelons of reaction forces which would be ready to move quickly to any part of the line that might need assistance. To quote from the base defense narrative published by the Third Brigade: "...each of the four defense sectors maintain a fifteen man quick reaction force at the sector CP. Three platoon size ready reaction forces (RF "All Glory", RF Bravo, and RF Charlie) are maintained under base defense control. One quad-fifty machine gun and two 40mm "dusters" are included in the reserve forces." In addition to these the Brigade has at its disposal a rifle company as Brigade RRF (Ready Reaction Force) in the "VIP" center. In the attack on the night of the 12th of August, this system worked exactly as it was designed to, in spite of the natural confusion, and was able to handle sapper attacks at three different locations on the perimeter by some of the best sappers in the business.

The night of 11 August 1969 was an unusually dark one. The moon was almost in its "new moon" phase, and the sky was overcast. The troops manning the bunkers could barely make out the first strand of concertina only twenty yards from them, and their starlight scopes did not even have enough light to be any help. Illumination rounds were fired periodically, but as Specialist Four Raymond Friston of B Company 1-8 says, "All it did was spoil your night vision, so you were worse off than when you started." Friston, who



had just returned from R&R in Bangkok, was pulling "green line" duty on bunker number 18 in the Blue Sector until he could rejoin his unit in the field.

"It was after about ten o'clock that we started hearing noises, like somebody moving out in front of our bunker. Lt Farington (Blue Sector Commander) would call in an illume, but we wouldn't see nothin'. We was all awake, and scared too. Man, I KNEW those gooks were out there, but you just can't shoot at something when you can't see it. Everybody'll think you are just nervous."

Lt Farington, too, was nervous. He ordered his troops to fire some M-79 rounds in the direction of the sounds, and they seemed to stop for awhile. He had been told that there was a good chance that Andy would be hit that night, but, "They had cried "Wolf" so many times before, it kind of lost its effect." Still, the message was not ignored, and the guards were alert.

Things quieted down after midnight, and the troops in the Blue Sector began to wonder if they had really heard anything or not. Lt Farington began making his rounds at 0100, driving along the road in his jeep, and getting out to talk to the guards in the bunkers. He had reached bunker 19 (see sketch) when the artillery positions behind his bunker started taking incoming. At the same time a trip flare went off inside the wire in front of bunker 15, and a half naked enemy sapper was outlined. All the bunkers opened fire almost instantly. "I couldn't see nothing," reports Friston, still on bunker 18, "but when that trip flare went off I just started shooting."

The volume of return fire they got surprised nearly everyone. "They were all over the place," says Harvard graduate Sp/4 Grenville Braman, who was in bunker 16. "I was asleep in my hammock inside the bunker when the guys that were pulling guard on top came tumbling in bouncing me out." Fire was coming from inside the wire and around behind their bunker as well. "It was mostly RPG's that we got," continued Braman, "and it looked like bunker 15 was taking a lot of hits."

