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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
18TH MILITARY HISTORY DETACHMENT  
25TH INFANTRY DIVISION  
APO San Francisco 96225

AVDCMH

23 September 1969

SUBJECT: Combat After Action Interview Report

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

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

1. NAME AND TYPE OF ORGANIZATION: Combined US/ARVN forces, see paragraph 7, Task Organization.

2. INCLUSIVE DATES OF OPERATION: 4-5 September 1969.

3. LOCATION: Ref Map Series L7014, Sheet Number 6231 II, Grid XT521349; Khiem Hanh District, Tay Ninh Province, Republic of Vietnam.

4. CONTROL HEADQUARTERS:

a. US - 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division.

b. ARVN - 1st Brigade, 1st Airborne Division.

5. PERSONS INTERVIEWED:

a. LTC Bruce F. Williams, 04524051, Commanding Officer, 2d Battalion (Mechanized), 22d Infantry.

b. 2LT Michael P. Pate, <sup>Removed by</sup> <sub>VNCA</sub>, Platoon Leader, 2d Platoon, Company A, 2d Battalion, 34th Armor (Acting team commander during most of the contact period).

6. INTERVIEWING OFFICER: Assistant Division Historian.

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Authority <u>NND 927622</u>
By <u>N.C.</u> NARA Date <u>11-30-00</u>

## 7. TASK ORGANIZATION:

US - A/2-22 Mech (-3d Plt)  
2/A/2-34 Arm

ARVN - 12th Co/7th Abn Bn

## 8. SUPPORTING FORCES:

## a. Artillery:

- (1) Btry B, 1st Bn, 8th Arty (105mm) - FSB Pershing (XT517258).
- (2) Btry C, 7th Bn, 9th Arty (105mm) - FSB Wood III (XT441346).
- (3) Btry A, 1st Bn, 27th Arty (155mm) - Dau Tieng (XT494475).
- (4) 1 Plt, Btry D, 3d Bn, 13th Arty (8") - FSB Hampton (XT416244).
- (5) Btry C, 2d Bn, 32d Arty (8"/175mm) - Dau Tieng (XT494475)

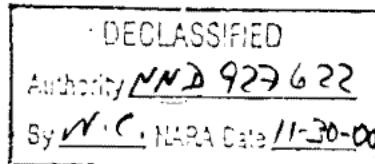
## b. Army Aviation:

- (1) Co A, 25th Avn Bn - 1 UH1H - "Flame Bath"  
1 UH1H - Tactical CS.
- (2) Co B, 25th Avn Bn - 2 AH1G Gunships (2 sorties).
- (3) Troop D, 3d Sqdn, 4th Cav - 2 AH1G Gunships.

## c. USAF:

- (1) 3 - OV10 - 25th Div T.A.C.P.,
- (2) 4 - A37 Fighters.
- (3) 8 - F100 Fighters.

9. BACKGROUND INFORMATION: In the first week of August 1969, the US II Field Forces and ARVN III Corps Commanders directed that operations be conducted in the Boi Loi Woods to complete the destruction of the remaining enemy Sub-Region 1 (SR1) forces in that area. To achieve this goal, ARVN III Corps allocated the 1st Brigade, 1st Airborne Division; and the 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division tasked the 2d Battalion (Mech), 22d Infantry. The 2-22 Mech was based at FSB Wood III (XT441346) and one ARVN airborne battalion was co-located with it on a rotating basis. The 2-22 Mech and the airborne battalion were not under a unified command, but did closely coordinate their operations, and operations were often jointly planned and conducted by elements of both units maneuvering together, but again not operating under a unified command. The reason for maintaining separate command structures was primarily psychological - to preclude the development of ARVN dependence on the US force and to encourage their independence and aggressiveness.



Previous to the action on 4-5 September, the 25th Infantry Division had developed an SOP under which the Division Tactical Operations Center would react to each significant contact by immediately dispatching a fire support "package" consisting of a forward air controller, a helicopter fire team, a helicopter loaded with tactical CS gas, and a "Flame Bath" (3 55-gallon drums - 2 diesel fuel and 1- AV Gas w/igniters) helicopter. In this manner, the Division would bring all types of available fire support to bear against the enemy in the first minutes of contact. Once these assets arrived on station, they were under the control of the ground commander and he would coordinate their employment.

10. INTELLIGENCE:

a. Enemy - There were no specific intelligence leads to this operation. There was, however, continuous intelligence that enemy units under the control of SR-1 were operating in the Boi Loi Woods. In the seventeen days prior to this contact, units of the 2-22 Mech had made five (5) significant contacts in the Boi Loi Woods. For several months, captured documents, PW's, Hoi Chanh, and agent reports had indicated that SR-1 units were understrength, low on food, and suffering from low morale.

b. Terrain - The Boi Loi Woods has scattered trees over one foot in diameter; large areas of trees under one foot in diameter, generally spaced two to ten feet apart; and is generally filled in with brush from two to eight feet tall. In many areas the density of vegetation has been lessened by B52 strikes, tactical air strikes, and artillery. Besides clearing away some of the vegetation the high explosives have also left many areas so densely cratered that the craters are more of an obstacle to vehicular movement than the vegetation was. Standing water and waterlogged soil have further limited vehicular access into and mobility within the Boi Loi Woods. The vegetation provides excellent concealment. Observation and fields of fire are limited, generally from 10-20 meters (See Photograph 1 - Terrain). From 31 May 1969 to 9 June 1969, the 60th Land Clearing Company conducted Rome Plow operations in the upper Boi Loi Woods. During that period the 60th LC Co split the woods into four quadrants with an "X" cut. The arms of the "X" varied in width from approximately one (1) kilometer to approximately 500 meters. (See Photograph 2) After Rome Plow operations were completed, the deadfall was not cleared out since it was too wet to burn and civilians did not enter the area to cut firewood. Even though the deadfall provided some concealment and occasional obstacles to tracked vehicles, the Rome Plow cut greatly increased aerial observation and gave rapid, relatively secure, access for mechanized units to previously inaccessible areas. Further, the Rome Plow cut made it possible for mechanized units to establish night laagers in the heart of the woods. The cover and concealment offered by deadfall, craters and partially destroyed enemy positions which remained after Rome Plow operations were insignificant compared to that offered by the standing vegetation.

11. MISSION: Team A, 2-22 Mech was to conduct a combined dismounted reconnaissance with the 12th Airborne Company through the eastern quadrant of the

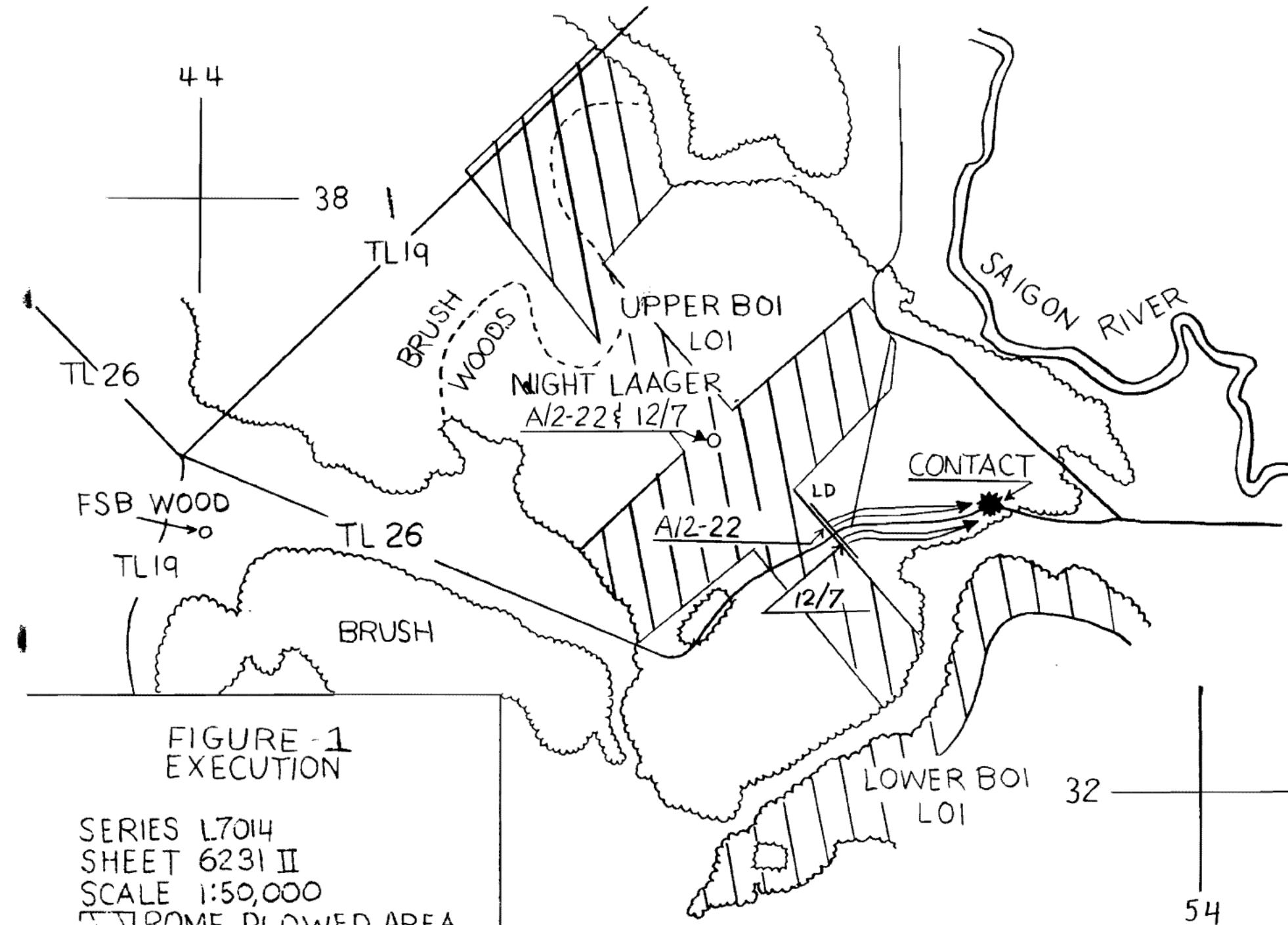


FIGURE 1  
EXECUTION

SERIES L7014  
SHEET 6231 II  
SCALE 1:50,000  
 ROME PLOWED AREA

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By W.C. NARA Date 11-30-00

upper Boi Loi Woods and upon completion, mount the airborne company and move back to the Rome Plowed area to establish a combined night laager.

12. CONCEPT OF OPERATION AND EXECUTION: The coordinated operation order and overlay provided for a flexible operation giving the general area to be searched and approximate axis of advance. (See Figure 1)

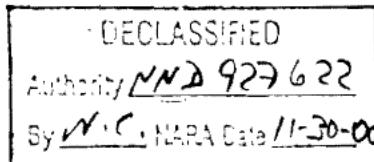
After crossing the LD at 0830 hours, Team A and 12/7th Abn moved along axes parallel to an unused trail. When not engaged in a detailed search, the two units moved in a column type formation. The vehicles were in a double column led by the three M48A3 tanks of 2/A/2-34 Arm. The first platoon, A/2-22 Mech was dismounted, moving on line ahead of the tanks. The second platoon, A/2-22 Mech, was dismounted in column, providing left flank security. The right side of the formation was covered by 12/7 Abn, moving in a narrow "T" formation (See Figure 2).

Through the morning and early afternoon of 4 September 1969, the Team searched several areas. At 1125 hours, in the vicinity of XT515348, they found six (6) spider holes and two (2) tunnels which showed no recent activity, and were destroyed. By 1155 hours, further search of the same area had disclosed two (2) 4' x 4' x 5' bunkers with three (3) feet of overhead cover and a four (4) meter tunnel off each bunker. The bunkers showed signs of recent use and it was estimated that 5-6 personnel had spent the previous night there.

Two (2) RPG-2 rounds were located under some foliage in the vicinity of XT519348 at 1330 hours and destroyed. Shortly thereafter, a Russian 50-pound anti-tank mine was found in the trail in the vicinity of XT521349. No attempt was being made to clear the trail but the MACV advisor with the 12/7 Abn noticed the mine as they paralleled the trail. Making a detailed search of this area, a fresh trail recently traveled by 2-3 personnel moving northeast was found at 1418 hours. At 1425 hours, lead elements of the Team spotted suspected movement to their north.

With signs of recent activity and suspected movement ahead, the Team Commander decided to deploy his infantry and tanks on line, followed by the APC's on line in support, and sweep a heavily vegetated area to the north-northeast in which the movement had been reported. The Team's present location was so heavily cratered that the vehicles had been confined to movement in file.

The Team Commander moved his infantry on line to the left of the tanks and requested that the ARVN troops move on line to the right. In order for tank 23 to come on line, tank 24 had first to move forward and allow 23 to pass to its rear, because of numerous craters. At 1445 hours, after tank 24 had advanced approximately 10 meters, two (2) RPG rounds were fired from the brush to the left front, impacting on the gunshield, killing the driver and burning the tank commander's face. At the same time, the enemy began firing AK-47's and a .51 caliber machine gun from the right front. (See



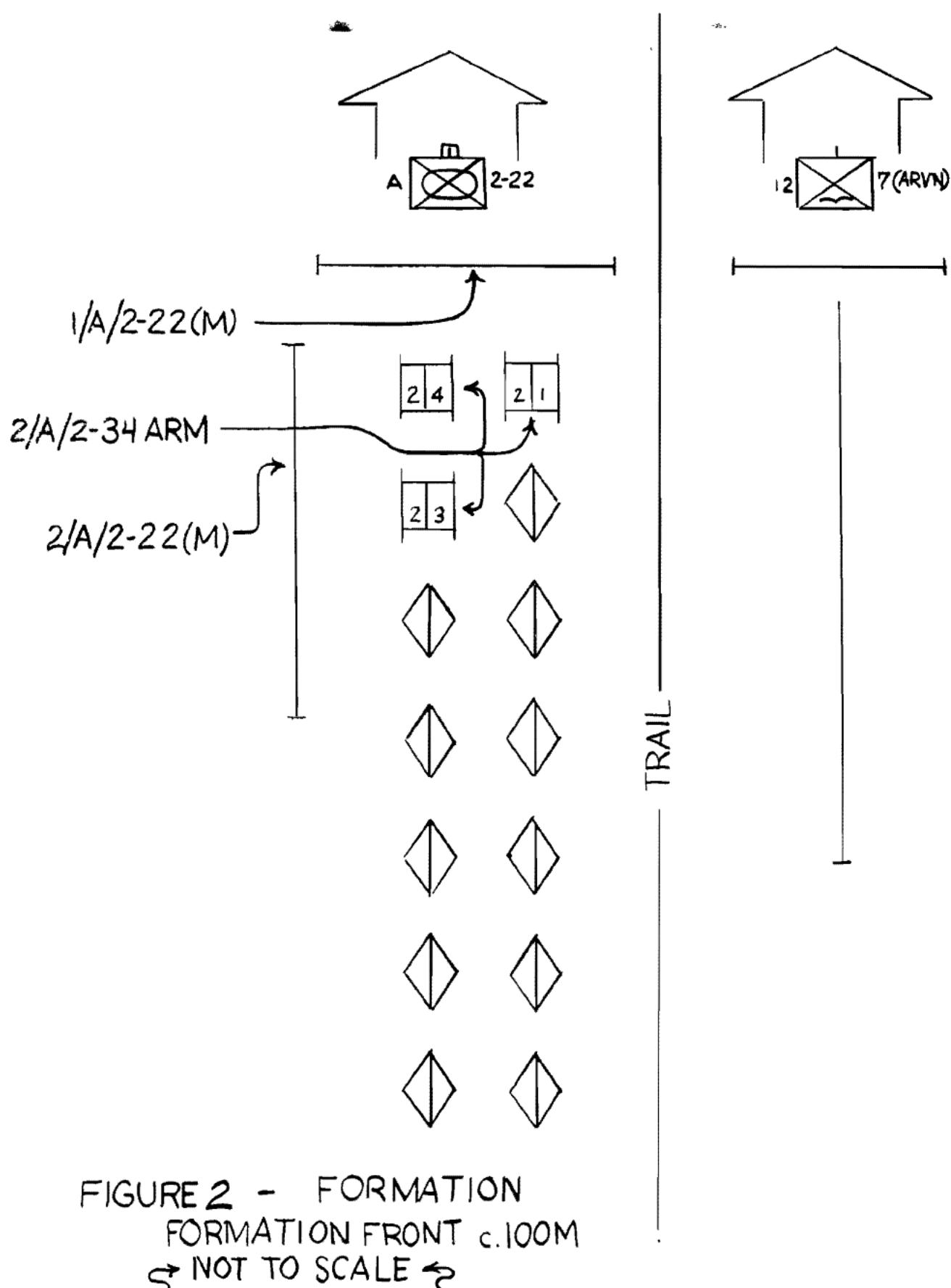


Figure 3). The Team immediately returned fire with small arms, caliber .50 machine guns and the tank main guns. The platoon leader's tank (tank 21) went out of action after its first round from a ruptured cartridge. As the crew of tank 24 was recovering the dead driver, they observed a group of ten (10) enemy in the brush and killed all ten (10) with a cannister round.

At 1455 hours, the 2-22 Mech requested an urgent MEDEVAC, not knowing that the driver was dead, and a helicopter light fire team. This request was forwarded by the Division Tactical Operations Center to the 25th Aviation Battalion as a requirement for a Light Fire Team, a CS drop and a "flame bath". A Forward Air Controller was directed to the contact area and arrived overhead at 1456 hours. The 25th Aviation Battalion supplied the flame bath by diverting an airborne ship which arrived on station at 1457 hours.

Despite the damage and casualties to the crew, tank 24 fired eight (8) rounds of cannister and its caliber .50 machine gun before it was ordered to retire to join two mired M113's approximately 100 meters to the rear in an open area. With tank 21's main gun out of action, tank 23 moved to the spot where tank 24 had been hit and engaged the enemy with its main gun.

The Team Commander ordered his infantry forward and attempted to deploy his APC's to support them. Bomb craters so limited the movement of vehicles that the APC's could not deploy out of a single file until they had advanced beyond tank 23's position. The high volume of enemy fire directed at the Team from the left half of the enemy position, and the .51 caliber fire coming from the right side stopped the Team's infantry approximately 10 meters from the enemy's forward bunkers.

Unable to maneuver, and too close to the enemy positions to engage them with supporting ordnance, the Team Commander ordered his elements to pull back approximately 40 meters. As they began the withdrawal, the Team Commander was wounded and the tank platoon Leader assumed command since he was at the focal point of the action. The dismounted elements were able to mark the trace of the enemy bunkers with smoke grenades as they pulled back.

Upon initial contact, the ARVN airborne company had withdrawn to the vicinity of the two mired APC's, drawing sporadic fire as they pulled back.

As Team A withdrew, their artillery forward observer adjusted artillery behind the enemy bunker line, engaging the area in depth. By 1515 hours, the Team had completed its short withdrawal, and enemy fire slackened. By 1532 hours, the necessary medical evacuations were completed and the 2-22 Mech Battalion Commander, now airborne over the contact area, directed the drop of the "flame bath", and at 1534 hours, the 25th Aviation Battalion Light Fire Team began rocket and machine gun runs against the enemy forward positions.

The Forward Air Controller put in the first air strike at 1539 hours:

NOTE: NOT ALL ENEMY WEAPONS SHOWN - LOCATIONS APPROX.

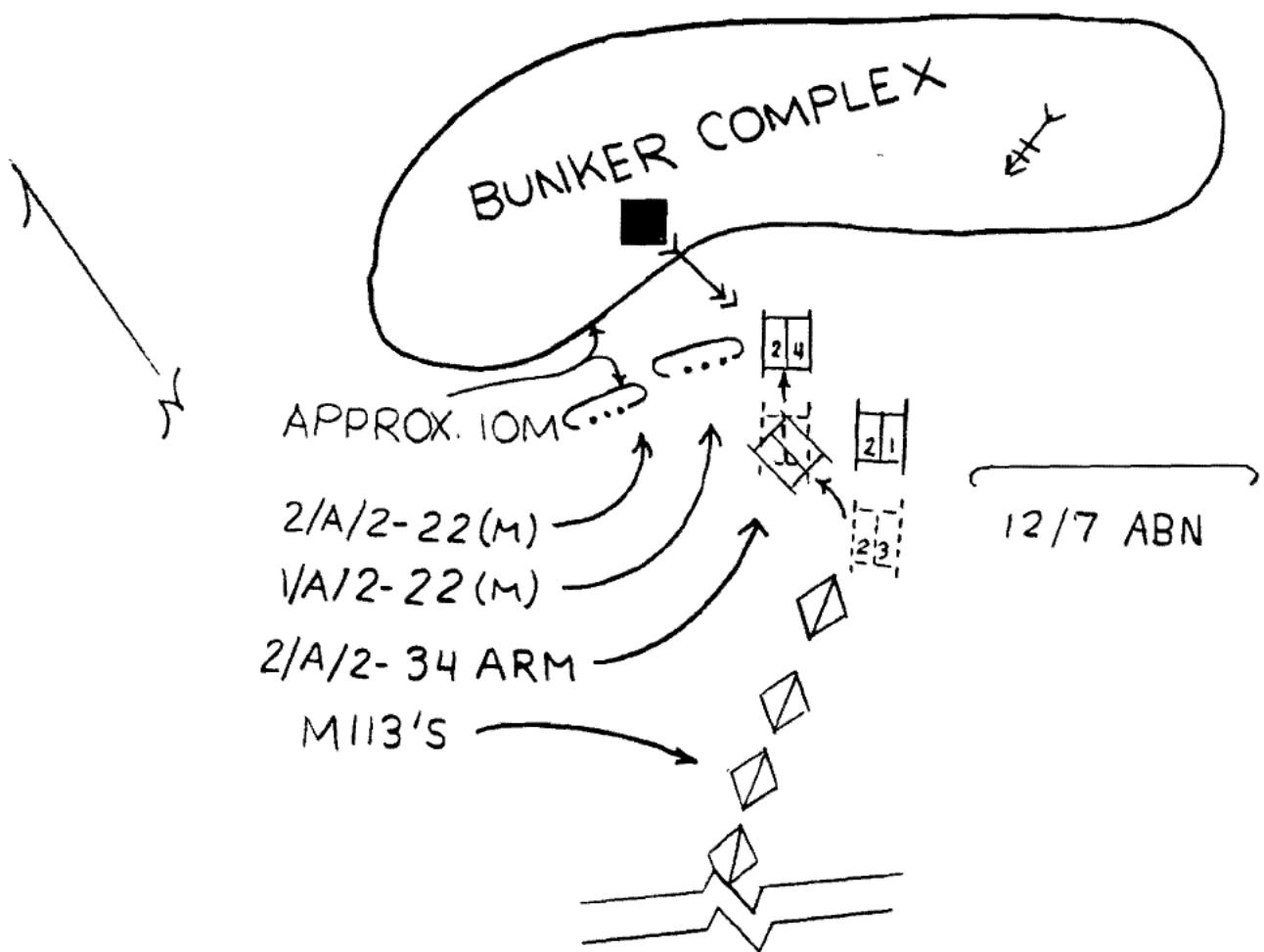


FIGURE-3  
INITIAL CONTACT

NOT TO SCALE

MIRED M113'S  
APPROX 100M TO REAR, IN OPEN

two (2) A37 fighters, dropping four (4) 500-pound bombs each into the area behind the forward bunkerline.

The CS ship with 12 E158 CS cannisters on board arrived on station at 1541 hours.

The second air strike, consisting of two (2) F-100's dropping two (2) 500-pound bombs each and two (2) napalm containers each, was put in at 1600 hours.

It was decided to deliver the CS in three (3) passes of four (4) cannisters each. The A/25 Avn Light Fire Team had returned with a second load of ordnance and was expended between CS drops. Although it did not interfere with the use of the CS on this operation, the commander's options were limited because the 12/7 Abn did not have protective masks. The CS drops began at 1616 hours and the third drop was completed at 1626 hours. Following the last drop, artillery fire was shifted into the area of the CS drop.

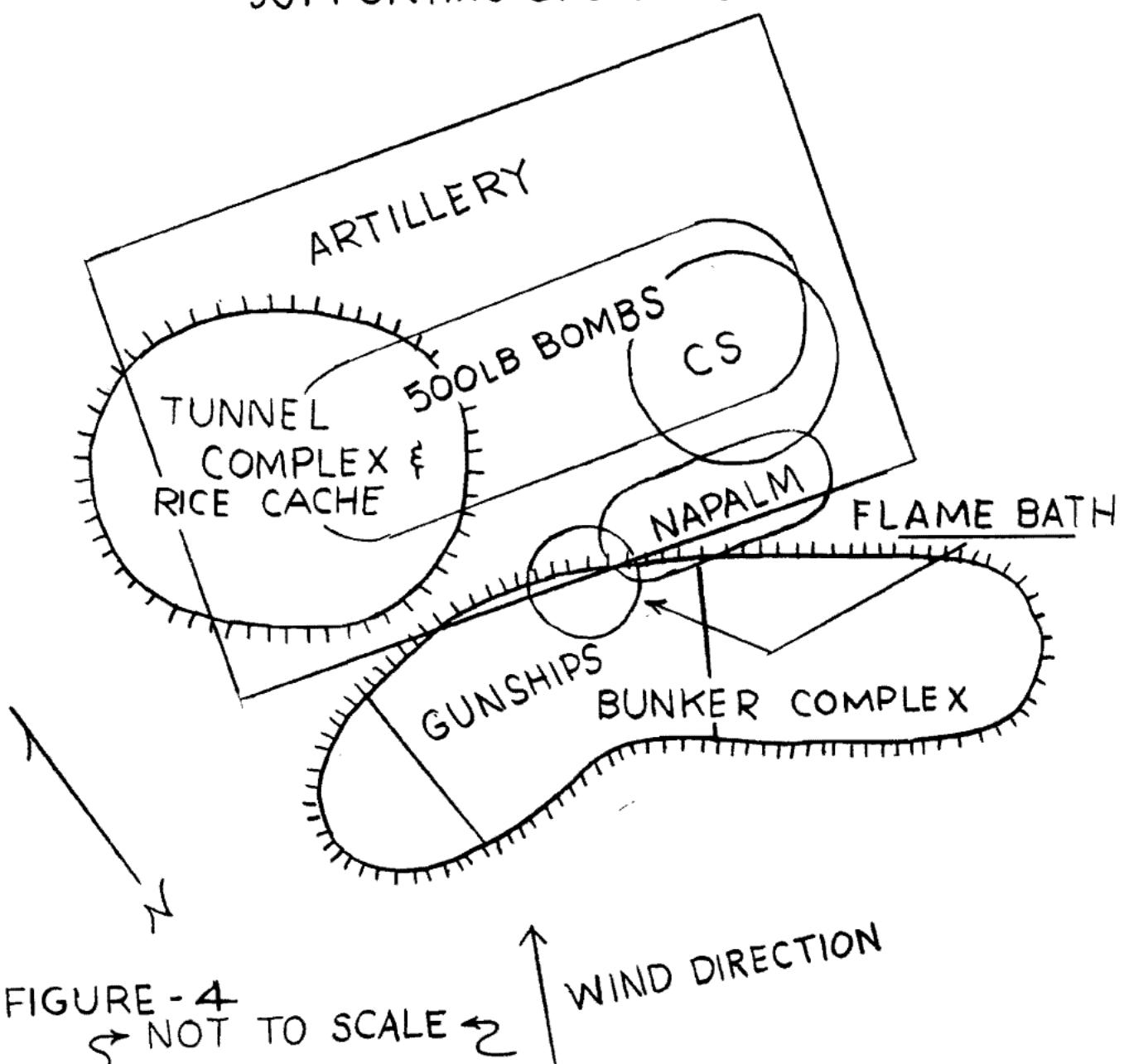
(Figure 4 compares the pattern of fire support with the actual enemy dispositions as determined by a ground sweep on 5 September. The fire support was delivered in depth, based on the correct assumption that the enemy position was constructed in depth.)

While the artillery was firing following the last CS drop, the Team Commander requested that the 12/7 Abn move up on his right flank and join him in sweeping the contact area. The MACV advisor attempted to get the ARVN unit to join the team, but was unsuccessful. When the 2-22 Mech Battalion Commander landed to refuel his light observation helicopter, the Assistant Division Commander for Maneuver had made his UH1 Command and Control ship available for the Battalion Commander's use. The 2-22 Mech Battalion Commander had picked up the 7th Airborne Battalion Commander and S3 and their MACV advisor. Thus, when the coordination problem arose, both the concerned battalion commanders were over the battlefield in the same helicopter. After being briefed on the situation, the ARVN Battalion Commander ordered the 12/7 Abn to move up and join the sweep, which it did.

The Division Tactical Operations Center had been monitoring the action and had previously ordered Troop D, 3d Squadron, 4th Cavalry to dispatch a light fire team to replace the A/25 Avn element. The "Centaur" gunships arrived on station at 1645 hours.

As Tm A/2-22 Mech and 12/7 Abn moved forward toward the enemy position, they were still unable to maneuver their vehicles other than advancing on the single file track that they had used previously. The remaining fully operational tank from 2/A/2-34 Arm led the column with the 2-22 Mech dismounted elements on its left and the 12/7 Abn on its right. Tank 23 advanced to within 20 meters of the known RPG position and engaged it with the main gun. Inaccurate RPG fire was returned. A high volume of automatic weapons and .51 caliber fire was received across the entire front and sporadic sniper fire came from the left flank. (See Figure 5)

## SUPPORTING ORDNANCE



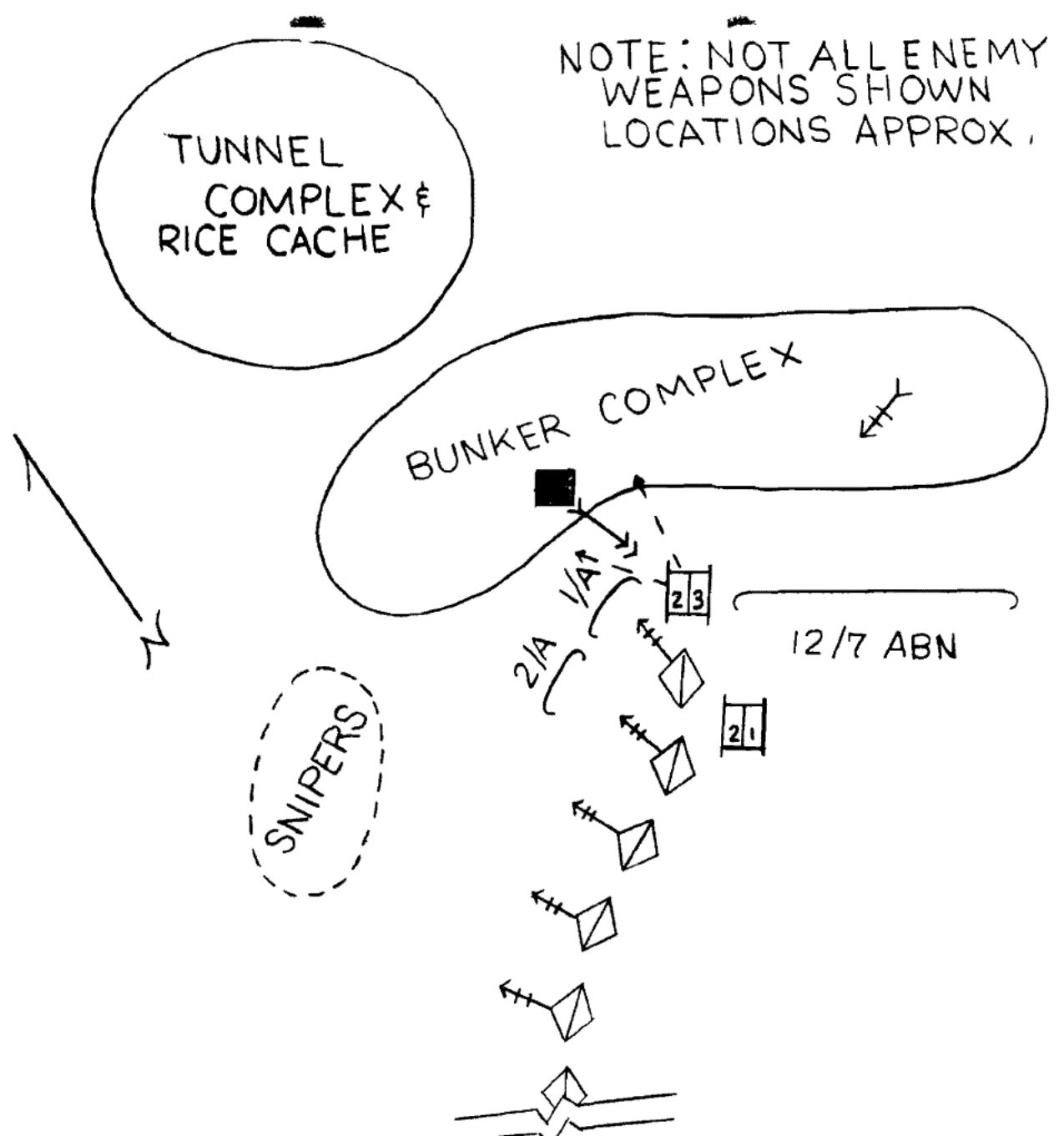
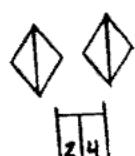


FIGURE - 5  
SECOND EFFORT

NOT TO SCALE



APPROX 100M TO  
REAR, IN OPEN

Tm A/2-22 Mech and the 12/7 Abn engaged the enemy with organic weapons but were not able to suppress the enemy fire. The APC's were not able to employ their caliber .50 machine guns to the front but were able to place suppressive fire on the snipers on the left flank. Unable to silence the enemy fire after almost 30 minutes of close contact, unable to effectively maneuver the APC's, and having taken further wounded, the US and ARVN forces withdrew approximately 75 meters to bring artillery and gunship fire onto the enemy position.

The artillery fire was adjusted to the enemy positions and after MEDEVAC's were completed, the D/3-4 Cav light fire team engaged the area of heaviest enemy fire at 1751 hours.

When the rocket and machine gun runs were completed, the artillery fire was shifted and the US and ARVN forces again moved forward. They advanced in essentially the same formation and were again met by a high volume of enemy fire. The enemy fire from the left flank had increased in volume (See Figure 6).

The advance was again stopped before the APC's could deploy on line. At 1742 hours, enemy fire from the left flank was of sufficient volume that the Team leader had his infantry fall back on their APC's so that the area could be saturated with caliber .50 machine gun fire. The US and ARVN units remained in close contact with the enemy for 20 to 30 minutes and suffered further wounded. Still unable to silence the enemy fire or effectively maneuver, they again withdrew to allow supporting elements to engage the enemy positions.

Artillery was shifted into the area and at 1817 hours, "Issue 15", who had replaced "Issue 13" as Forward Air Controller, directed the delivery by two (2) F-100's of two (2) 500-pound bombs and two (2) containers of napalm each. The air strike was completed at 1829 hours.

At 1830 hours, with darkness rapidly approaching, the Team Commander requested permission to leave the contact area and move to a night laager position. The 2-22 Mech Commander approved the request and the team recovered its mired vehicles and the US and ARVN forces moved toward the Rome Plow cut. They returned to the Rome Plow cut along the axis of advance they had used entering the area.

Rather than moving to the planned laager site, the US and ARVN forces were directed to laager where the two mortar tracks and maintenance track from A/2-22 Mech had been located. Beginning at 1702 hours, six (6) helicopter sorties of resupply for the troops in contact had been flown to the mortar position and Tm A/2-22 Mech and 7/12 Abn laagered there to facilitate resupply.

During their last two attempts to overrun the enemy position part of the enemy fire had come from snipers in trees. Four (4) snipers were blown out of their trees by M48 main gun fire and another was killed by M16 fire from the Team's infantry.

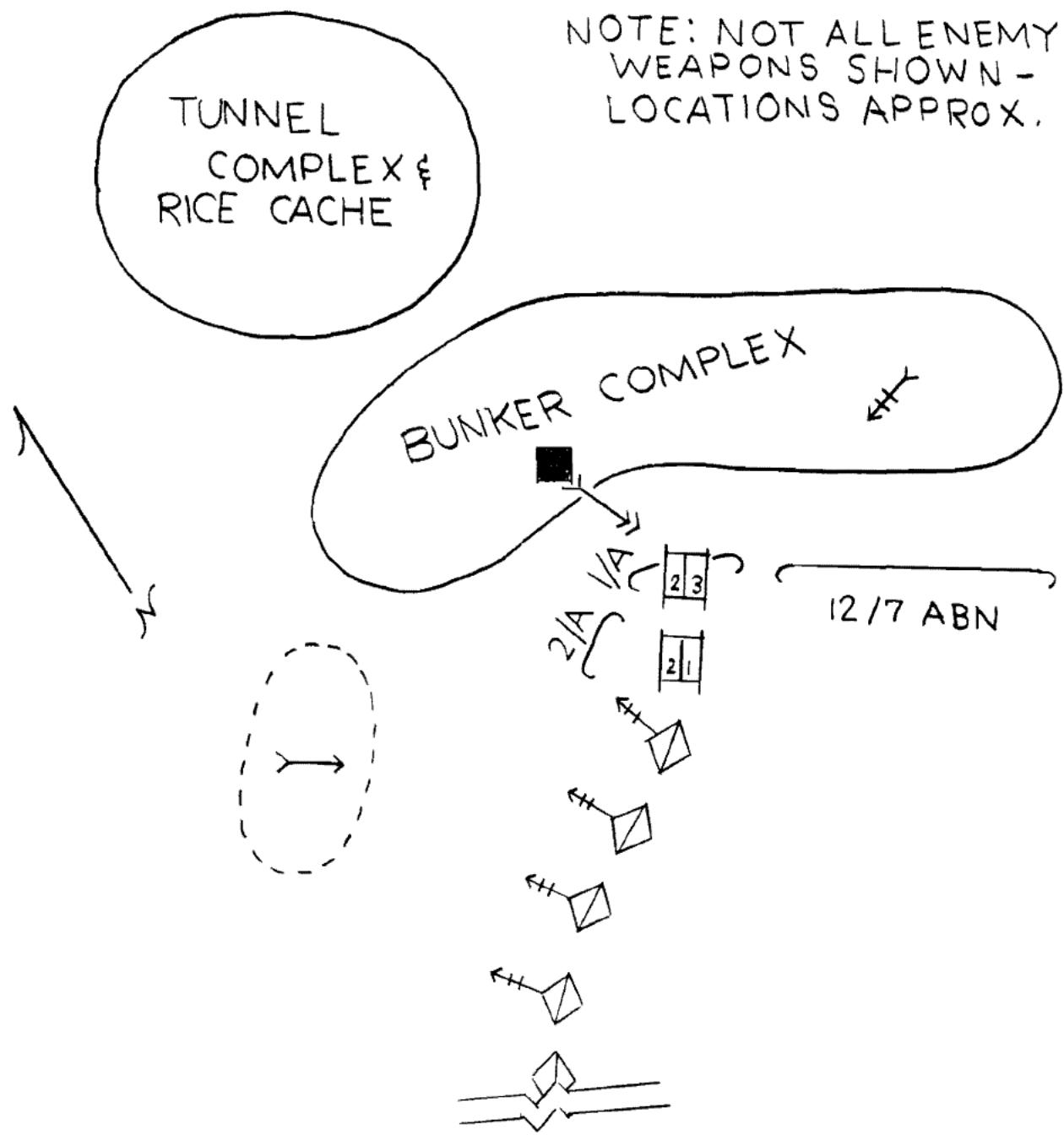
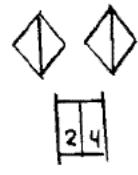


FIGURE -6  
THIRD EFFORT

NOT TO SCALE



APPROX 100M TO REAR, IN OPEN

The move to the night laager (XT491356) was without incident, except for one (1) NVA spotted in a treeline at 1855 hours. The lone enemy was engaged with caliber .50 machine gun fire but the results were not determined. The US and ARVN forces closed on their night laager at 1952 hours.

As the Team was moving out, the 2-22 Mech S-3 requested air strikes be put in the contact area all night. Air strikes were put in at 2000 hours, 2030 hours and 2058 hours. The six (6) sorties totaled 12 500-pound bombs and 12 napalm containers.

The next day, 5 September, elements of the 2-22 Mech swept the contact area. There were no enemy remaining and a careful search of the area was made.

This search revealed the shape of the enemy bunker complex and also the tunnel system behind the bunker complex. When the enemy had evacuated the position, they left behind 1000 pounds of rice in the tunnels, which the 2-22 Mech recovered. They also found a body that the enemy failed to remove in one of the bunkers. The enemy body was unmarked and apparently was killed from concussion during one of the air strikes. The area was strewn with uniforms and pieces of uniforms. Dried blood was found inside of many of the bunkers. Letters and notebooks were located which identified the 83d Rear Service Group. This unit provides logistical support to the SR-1 elements. No identification was gained on enemy tactical units.

While the search of the enemy position was in progress, a gunship from D/3-4 Cav spotted an abandoned mortar position, with mortar in place, outside of the search area. The "Centaur" gunship engaged the position and destroyed the mortar.

#### 13. RESULTS:

##### a. Friendly casualties and losses:

(1) US: KIA - 1  
WIA - 10  
One (1) M48A3 damaged

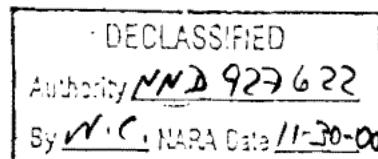
(2) ARVN: WIA - 1

##### b. Enemy casualties and losses:

KIA - 16  
Rice (evacuated) - 1000 pounds  
Mortar (destroyed) - 1

#### 14. ANALYSIS:

a. Operations in terrain such as the Boi Loi Woods are difficult for any type of force. The combination of dense brush and closely grouped craters



in the contact area presented an obstacle which effectively limited the maneuver capability of this mechanized/tank team. Only two of the armored vehicles (tanks 21 and 23) could place effective fire on the enemy positions, the firepower of the M113's could not support the advancing troops, thus during the attempted sweeps the advantage remained with the entrenched enemy.

b. The previous Rome Plow operations had done much to offset these terrain disadvantages. Units could gain rapid access to the likely contact areas, and spend more time searching and/or developing a contact. Ground reinforcement could be more easily effected if needed.

c. The immediate dispatch of "packaged" air assets by the Division Tactical Operations Center greatly assisted the Battalion Commander. After the initial contact report, the elements in contact were provided continuous air support throughout the fight. The Battalion Commander had only to concern himself with the employment of the assets made available to him. Besides allowing the commander to concentrate on the actual conduct of the battle, the initiation of support by the DTOC also reduced the volume of radio traffic on the Battalion Command Net.

d. The assumption of command by the tank platoon leader was the best solution in this situation. He was centrally located and had better observation and communication than the two rifle platoon leaders on the ground. He displayed both aggressiveness, in repeated attempts to sweep the enemy position, and sound judgment in recognizing that he had not gained sufficient superiority to do this.

e. The lack of a unified command on the operation initially threatened to prevent the full force of the US and ARVN elements from being brought to bear on the enemy. However, the co-location of the US and ARVN battalion commanders over the battlefield allowed on-the-spot coordination which prevented dissipation of the available force. Besides the desire of both commanders to destroy the enemy, there was also a background of daily coordination in planning and conducting similar operations.



MICHAEL D. KEATING  
Major, Armor  
Division Historian