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By TJ NARA Date 6/8/99

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Reports

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS 9TH INFANTRY DIVISION
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96370

AVDE-CG

29 May 1969

SUBJECT: History of the Battle of Thanh Phu, 11 - 12 March 1969

SEE DISTRIBUTION

1. On 11-12 March 1969 the 1st Brigade, 9th Infantry Division, engaged the 261 B VC Main Force Battalion in the village of Thanh Phu in the vicinity of My Phuoc Tay at the edge of the Plain of Reeds in upper Dinh Tuong Province. Eight US companies made day and night helicopter assaults into the area to surround the enemy, and tactical air, artillery, and air cavalry were utilized to bring over-powering firepower into the enemy's position.
2. One month later the Headquarters Secretary of the 261 B Battalion was captured in an ARVN engagement. This young VC officer turned out to be an intelligent, well educated, hard core Viet Cong that had a complete grasp of the Battle of Thanh Phu. His interrogators believed that he wrote an account of the battle for the battalion commander, which was sent to the Headquarters, Dong Thap I Regiment, MR II. He admitted discussing the battle with all his unit officers. In addition it became apparent that the prisoner was very gifted in the art of expressing himself, and he was asked to write in his own words an account of the battle. This he did, and his account with clarifying sketch maps is attached. The account of the 9th Infantry Division participation is also described by Colonel Ira A. Hunt, Jr., Commanding Officer of the 1st Brigade. The parallelism between the two accounts is striking. As a result of the two accounts and previous experiences, Colonel Hunt has also delineated the lessons learned from the Battle of Thanh Phu.
3. Not only do these two accounts make absorbing reading, but it is believed that Free World Forces can learn much from the analysis of the Battle of Thanh Phu. The attached History of the Battle of Thanh Phu is therefore provided for your information.

1 Incl
The Battle of Thanh Phu,
11-12 March 1969

HARRIS W. HOLLIS
Major General, USA
Commanding

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The protective marking
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Lessons Learned, pgs 25-30
of Incl 1.

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THE BATTLE OF THANH PHU

On the morning of 11 March 1969 the 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry, of the 1st (Recondo) Brigade of the 9th Infantry Division was conducting "Jitterbug" operations in the vicinity of My Phuoc Tay, at the edge of the Plain of Reeds, in upper Dinh Tuong Province, trying to find and fix the enemy (See Orientation Map). By 1115 hours in the morning they had checked out all of their intelligence targets and had not established contact. However, the airborne personnel detector (People Sniffer) in the air cavalry troop command-and-control helicopter had obtained a significant reading along the Kinh Tong Doc Loc Canal and the battalion commander had decided to insert and check this out. Charlie Company was inserted at 1152 hours and about 1230 hours ran into a withering fusillade of enemy fire south of the canal about five kilometers west of the CIDG Camp at My Phuoc Tay. Thus started the Battle of Thanh Phu. Immediately, the pile-on commenced. Before the evening was over, eight US infantry companies had been inserted and tactical air, artillery and air cavalry had been brought to bear while Chinooks and Hueys had transported men and materiel.

It was later determined that an enemy battalion had been encircled and had been almost annihilated. This story has been carefully recounted by Prisoner of War Phan Xuan Quy, Headquarters Secretary (Battalion Adjutant) of the 261 B Main Force Battalion, Dong Thap I Regiment of Military Region II. The account of the 9th Division participation in the battle has also been described by Colonel Ira A. Hunt, Jr., Commanding Officer of the 1st Brigade. The parallelism between the two accounts is striking--time of insertions, weapons locations, bunkers, troop maneuvers--all relating very closely. The only major difference is in the box score. When the US statistics are compared to the VC claims, glaring inconsistencies are noted. These, too, tell a story: the conservatism of the US forces versus the exaggerations of the Communists. In the pages that follow, the prisoner of war's story, the 9th Infantry Division's depiction, and the lessons learned from the operation are provided. It is believed that the Free World Forces can learn much from the analysis of the Battle of Thanh Phu.

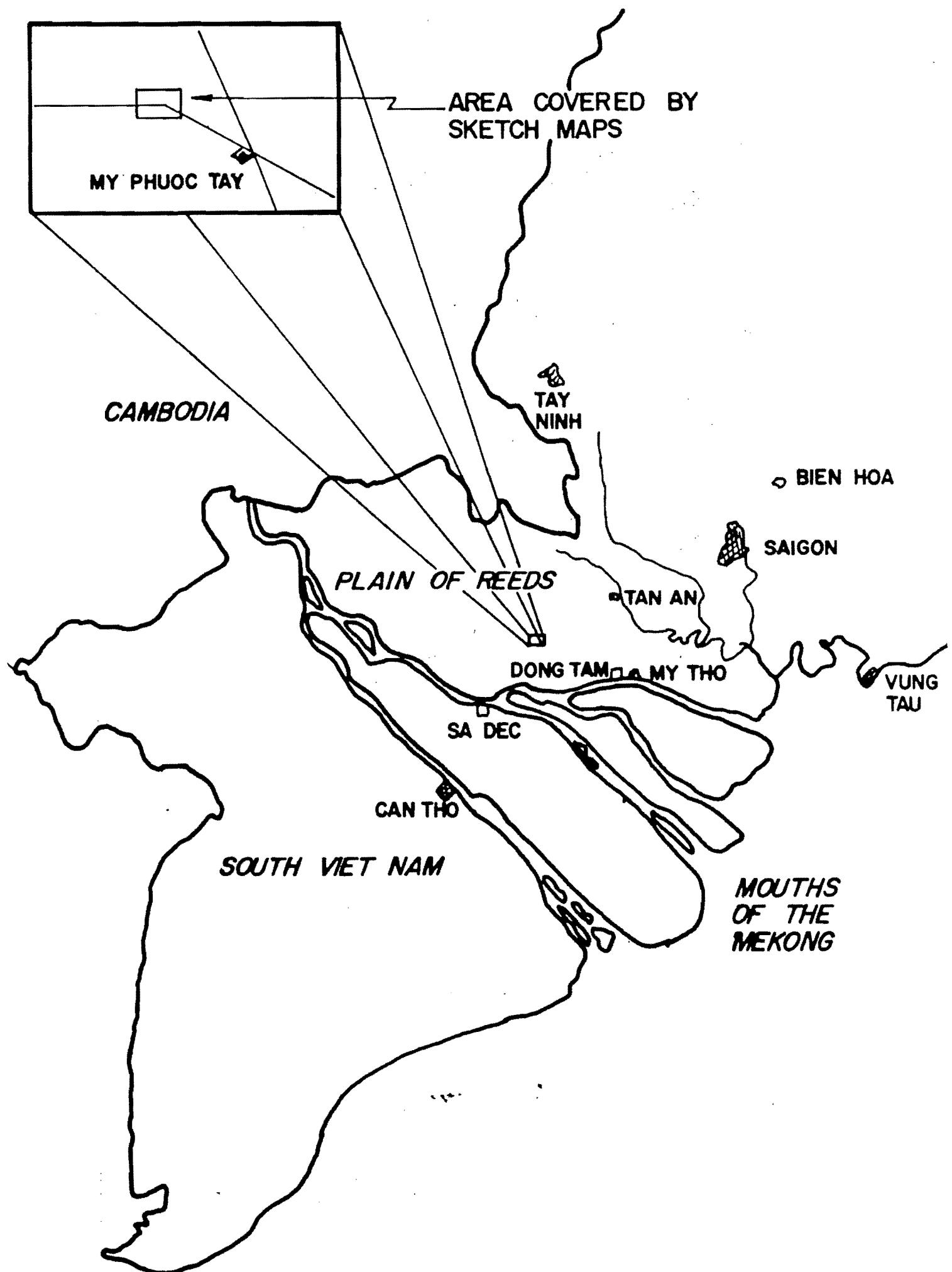
Box Score - Battle of Thanh Phu

Combat Statistics	Reported by US		Reported by VC	
	US	VC	US	VC
Forces in Contact	630	150-200	1500	298
Helicopter Insertions	101	NA	84	NA
Killed in Action	3	72	150	203
Wounded in Action	20	--	--	--
Weapons Lost	0	7	--	Unk
Aircraft Lost	1	NA	3	NA

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BATTLE OF THANH HU

ORIENTATION MAP



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An Account of

THE BATTLE OF THANH PHU

by

Phan Xuan Quy

Headquarters Secretary, 261 B Viet Cong Battalion

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The 261st B Battalion with four companies and a headquarters section totaling 268 men arrived to Thanh Phu (V) at 0200 hours on the morning of 11 March 1969 after many hours of traveling from Hau My (V). The time for travel varies depending upon the situation and whether or not bunkers are available at the new site. This day we started at 1700 hours. On arrival the battalion was joined by 30 guerrillas of Thanh Phu (V) and though very tired and hungry, immediately started building bunkers (usually 10 meters apart), and camouflaged the area because of constant fear of air and artillery strikes.

At 0630 hours, 11 March 1969 we suddenly received word from higher ranks that this morning there would be a sweep operation in our area. This message was received on a PRC-10 radio to the battalion commander by coded radio transmission from 122-X signal element. The 122-X signal company is assigned to Dong Thap I Regiment of MR II and has an element with each battalion.

Immediately we received an order from battalion headquarters to get in the bunkers and wait to see what happens in the next few hours. Our unit was tired and when we got word it was too late to move to another area with bunkers. We did not want to move during the daylight. Besides it usually takes us one to two hours to prepare to move because we have to raise our sunken sampans hidden in the small canals used to move our heavy weapons.

Two hours passed, then three hours, so I felt nothing was going to happen. I went out to look for some fish in the nearby canal, since I had not eaten since the day before. We get 28 piasters a day with which to buy rice. We spend very little in the first part of the month, saving seven or eight piasters a day with which to buy a duck or chicken for the squad or platoon to have an interesting party. A party for the morale of the unit and decorations are given at this time.

About a half an hour later (1030 hours, 11 March 1969) a small helicopter came into the area (C3) and flew around several times. We call this the "Staff Officer's" helicopter and when it visually recons the area, we know from past experience that US troops would definitely have an operation in that area. We had standing orders not to fire on helicopters when hiding in an area.

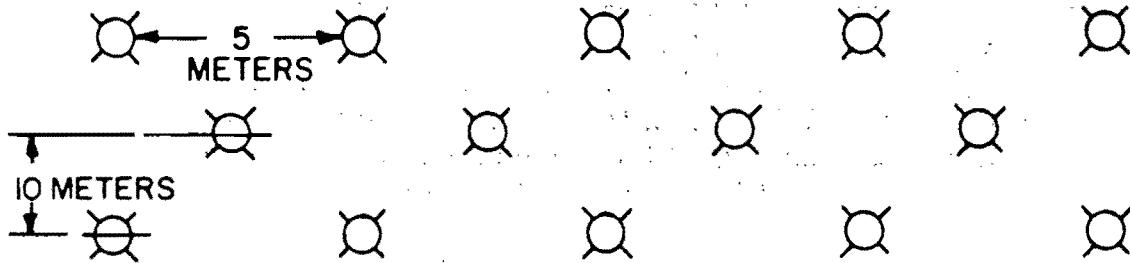
Suddenly another two helicopters came in and flew around our area. The order was immediately given by the C3 commander to prepare for combat. I think that then one of the helicopters discovered my position. It hovered right above me. Quickly I jumped in the ditch, trying to hide. The second helicopter was coming over fast and it looked like it was going to open fire on me. I jumped from the ditch and crawled to my bunker. As the helicopter came around again, I saw the ditch where I had been receive rockets and gunfire. The helicopters were dropping the "crying gas" and a marsh grass fire was set off by smoke grenades. To defend against the gas, we placed a wet cloth across the bunker openings, then lit a candle or burner to cause any gas which might penetrate the bunker to rise to the ceiling while we remained on the floor. This was 100 percent effective. The other method we use is to urinate on a towel and place it over the face. After the attack we use a "Chinese Oil" to clear the "crying gas" from our skin.

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At 1130 hours, 11 March 1969, I could see in the distance some helicopters coming from the south. Immediately I stood up on the top of the bunker where I could observe them. I could see five helicopters landing troops over 300 meters from my position (See Sketch Map A). The US helicopter assaults were very fast and well done, allowing us no time to move out. US troops came in almost immediately after the first two helicopters dropped the smoke grenades.

They were all Americans without a doubt, because they were tall and had huge bodies. They started to move in our direction. C3 element got ready to hold their position and had their gun emplacements ready for them. Then I could see them advancing through the booby trap area which the Thanh Phu (V) Guerrillas had set up for our unit as a defense. Local guerrillas are used to lay booby traps to protect the flanks of the battalion. They had set up these booby traps in three rows around our defense in the following way:



We had given the Thanh Phu (V) Guerrillas 150 grenades to set up for us plus they had some of their own. The guerrillas' position was set up along the south bank of Nguyen Van Tiep Canal four kilometers from the ARVN Special Forces of My Phuoc Tay Camp to the east. This area was familiar with the local guerrillas and main ways the ARVN Special Forces would come in. The guerrillas were spread out in this area which already had old bunkers there.

(1200 hours, 11 March 1969) US troops were moving fast, so I knew they did not have any idea the booby traps were there. Suddenly I heard some booby traps explode. Five US soldiers in the front element went down and were wounded or dead. Then the entire US element stopped, lay down for five minutes and started advancing again. I think US troops were staying too close together during movement. US troops moving single file, too close together causing many booby trap casualties.

I could feel the intensity of the heat on my face from the grass burning and the soldiers around me were coughing from the black smoke. Then I was informed that two killed in action and two wounded in action had resulted from the time the very first two helicopters had flown over our location (C3). US troops were still advancing, but now were dividing into two single file elements. They were 40 meters away from our location. 20 meters. ten meters. I remember seeing the tactic of advancing and dividing into single file elements being used by the ARVN's.

I heard someone yell "Fire!" To the right of my position two submachine guns swiftly spit out ammo at US troops. Meantime I gave the order to the machinegunner in my area to fire on the second part of the US element. I was put in charge of the machine gun in that area by the C3 commander, Ba Kiet, 37, K-54, when the positions were first set up. I had been ordered from battalion headquarters to stay with C3 element as acting platoon leader.

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We had them pinned down at this point (See Sketch Map A). Then I saw two helicopters fly over our C3 location and opened up, killing two soldiers and wounding three more to the west of my location. In my opinion US troops were moving in large groups allowing us to easily pin down the element with one or two machine guns. They waited until they were too close to our position to deploy any assault tactics. US troops believe that because they cannot see the VC in the area, the VC are not there.

About 1300 hours the reinforced elements of the US were landing 15 more helicopters to the east of C3 location approximately 350 meters away (See Sketch Map B). During this time the US was dispersing in that area where the second insertion took place. Two 82mm mortars from C4 (Heavy Weapon) element were firing away. I heard many mortar rounds hit that US element, but they were still advancing. The C4 Heavy Weapon element was set up in the middle of the defense area to protect battalion headquarters and provide artillery support to the infantry companies.

The US second inserted troop landing had started to break up into three elements to try to penetrate the battalion defense position: first element concentrating on C4 location; second element moved north to Thanh Phu Guerrillas position guarding the aid station in that area; third element was heading southwest to C3 location where I was. I ordered the machinegunner at my position to turn and fire at the second inserted landing of US troops to the east. At this time C3 and C4 machine gun elements were concentrating to fire on US advancing elements and it was effective because we had "dug in" positions and bunkers (See Sketch Map B). Then the C3 commander, Ba Kiet, near my position, gave the order to concentrate B40's and antitank weapons on the dikes and small canals which US soldiers were using as protection when advancing to the company defense positions from the east. Also he gave the order to start evacuating the wounded. The wounded are carried to a battalion aid station for emergency treatment by members of the battalion. From that point they are transported by recruited civilians to a hospital supporting the unit. Nylon hammocks are often used to transport the wounded.

About 1600-1700 hours, the C3 location was hit by helicopters. This time they destroyed two submachine guns and killed two west of my location. Suddenly there was a terrific flash to the north of C3 location near the Nguyen Van Tiep Canal where the Thanh Phu Guerrillas were located. No more firing was coming from that area. Later after the battle, I found out that this air strike knocked out the guerrilla position resulting in 30 Thanh Phu Guerrillas killed (See Sketch Map B). At 1700 hours there was one helicopter flying at low altitude at C3 location and spotted our position, forcing us to open up with AK-47 and machine gun fire. The helicopter was hit and started shaking as it flew back toward Highway 4 in a southwest direction.

The recon reported the following to battalion headquarters and this information was passed to the companies by field phone:

About 1730 hours the third element of US troops were landing 20 helicopters southwest of the battalion location (See Sketch Map C). The US troops were 400 meters from the contact area. They broke up into two elements; first element moving toward battalion headquarters and C4 location and second element toward C1 and C2 locations. At 1800 hours it was reported that the first element of this third US troop landing got hit by booby traps 150 meters

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from battalion headquarters and C4 location (See Sketch Map C). At 1830 hours it was reported that this third reinforced element then had pulled back 100 meters and deployed as a blocking force along the southwestern flank of our battalion location (See Sketch Map D).

I saw US troops using sniper fire tactics and launching M-79 rounds at our elements during this time. The battle area was covered with thick black smoke from the marsh grass fire.

About 1830 hours US troops to the east (second US troop landing) started to strongly assault the C4 Heavy Weapon element located in the center of the battalion defense formation (See Sketch Map E). Two helicopters and two jets had already destroyed the C4 Heavy Weapon position that had been blocking US troops coming from the east earlier. Many VC were lying around dead or wounded in that area. This caused the C1 (100 men) to reinforce the C4 element which was hit so badly and to continue to prevent US troops from penetrating that area by acting as a screening force. C2 had only 40 men and did not reinforce C4. C3 element was still holding off US elements to the south with small arms fire. During this time the elements kept close communication by using runners from platoon to companies headquarters and field phones were used from company headquarters to battalion headquarters. (This is how C1 knew to reinforce C4.) We had a PRC-10 radio at battalion headquarters but did not use it during contact because the helicopters might discover our positions.

About 1900 hours the C3 commander, Ba Kiet, 37, K-54 ordered some of his men to look around for dead bodies and hide them in bunkers and cover others with camouflage nylon because it would be dark soon.

About 2000 hours the US hit the C2 location and southern bank of Nguyen Van Tiep Canal with air and artillery strikes, but the C2 element had already pulled back before the strikes to the northwest where the C1 element was previously. They had only left a squad size element in the air/artillery strike zone to fire at US troops on the southwestern flank. The C2 soldiers had informed this to me after the battle (See Sketch Map F). Also during this time I did not know what was happening to the north of Nguyen Van Tiep Canal because we were in heavy contact with US elements to the east but the battalion commander, Le Ha, 44, K-54 had already known helicopters had landed to the north of this canal. He did not inform to our element (C3) because it would cause fear and low morale among the soldiers. I found this out later after the battle from him (See Sketch Map F).

About 2100 hours it was completely dark except for flares and the speed of the fire fight was diminishing, but sound of helicopters were heard and seen still flying around our area of defense. At this time our element (C3) was informed by the battalion commander, Le Ha, that 44 helicopters with US troops had landed and already set up all along the northern part of Nguyen Van Tiep Canal. At this time I just knew that US troops had completely surrounded our position (See Sketch Map G).

About 2200 hours the recon had reported to the battalion commander, Le Ha, that the withdrawal route was found. He informed to the companies that at 2300 hours the units would start withdrawing, element by element. At 2330 hours a recon member from battalion headquarters came down to C3 position to give the word that we were to move north to Nguyen Van Tiep Canal (See Sketch Map H). The strength of our element (C3) was very low at this time. Many small arms (AK-47) were lying around the bunkers

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where our soldiers lay dead. We placed some more of the dead in the bunkers and covered some with nylon stuff because US troops fail to check all possible places for bodies. Usually one day later a recon element goes back to check if US troops have left the area. Then they report back to battalion headquarters. A platoon size element is sent back into the area in the next few days to find the hidden bodies to bury them and to look for weapons that US troops failed to discover after the battle.

The C3 commander, Ba Kiet, told the soldiers to carry as many rifles and equipment with them as they could. I carried out a machine gun stand and an AK-47 rifle. The recon element then guided our element north to the Nguyen Van Tiep Canal. I saw, when we were withdrawing, that each soldier carried two to three small arms (AK-47, SKS, etc.). There were some flares in the sky around our defense area. In this case, where the tactical situation required rapid withdrawal, some weapons were hidden in the area of contact for pickup several days later.

About 0030 hours, when we reached the Nguyen Van Tiep Canal, the C3 element lost contact with the recon. The political officer, Bay Quyen, 27, K-54 took charge and guided the C3 on the withdrawal route. The rest of the battalion was ahead of C3 already moving west along the canal with elements ten meters apart. The battalion's main recon element was in front avoiding contact with US troops as much as possible. I would like to include here that the recon elements conducted continuous and extensive recon during the course of the contact to attempt to locate a gap in the US defense formation. They reported constantly to the battalion commander.

About 0045 hours, when the C3 element was along the Nguyen Van Tiep Canal, we began receiving M-16 and M-79 fire from the US troops on the northern bank of the canal. One round hit the machine gun stand I was carrying and I fell in a ditch. I picked up the stand and continued on. The tracers continued to fly all around us. Later the political officer found a new way to bypass traveling near the canal where the tracers were hitting (See Sketch Map H). Continuous air strikes were dropping all along the canal and surrounding area. When they came close to our position, we would lie down. While moving along the withdrawal route, we tried to run quickly to wherever the air/artillery strikes already hit. This is how we got through them. Move back when the first bombs fall. Then after the strikes, move back into the same area, as we believe the US does not bomb in the same area right away.

Approximately 0100 hours we finally reached the area where the battalion recon element was standing guard. They showed us the 50 meter gap where the rest of the battalion had made it through. The tactics we used here were the recon element secured each side of the gap. The companies infiltrated through the gap in small groups in single file. A small force is left behind in the contact area to cover the withdrawal of the main body (See Sketch Map H).

As we passed through the gap, we could hear the Americans talking loudly on both sides of us. We quietly took our clothes off upon reaching the Cha La Canal and made floating rafts out of nylon. These floating rafts hold the weapons while in the water as we swam to the other side. We did not use sampans because they can easily be detected by US helicopters. I just got out of there in time and was glad to be alive!

The air/artillery strikes could be heard in the distance as we were moving away from the contact area (0130-0200 hours). After moving out of that

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area for one and a half kilometers, I estimated 95 men left. The air/artillery strikes continued all night in the area of Thanh Phu.

On 13 March 1969, when we reassembled at the Trai Lon Canal after the battle, I found we had 20 deserters, leaving only 75 men left.

We discussed the battle. Before the battle we had 268 men in our unit plus there were 30 guerrillas. In the reassembly area after the battle there were 95 in the unit but 20 deserted. The 30 Thanh Phu (V) Guerrillas were killed by air/artillery strikes and general casualties were 173 men of our unit. It was unknown how many were killed and wounded of each company because the report was not made out that was to go to MR II. Since my position is secretary of the battalion at this time I have to collect the information and write the report to the battalion commander but the only thing I received was the weapon loss report. This consisted of the following:

C1 - 1 Machine gun	C2 - 1 Machine gun
1 B40	1 B40
1 60mm mortar	
C3 - 2 Submachine gun	C4 - 1 82mm mortar
1 B40	1 Machine gun

Small arms lost in the battle were not reported. The reason I have to take a long time to make a report is because the exact personnel loss was not reported by each company commander yet.

On the day of 13 March 1969 my battalion commander reported on the radio to the 1st Regiment that: There were 1500 US troops that participated in the battle from Saigon. We were courageous and killed 150 US troops, shot down one jet aircraft and two helicopters. After this the battalion commander gave the speech in front of the soldiers that the regiment highly recommended praise to each soldier.

On the 15th of March 1969 at 0300 hours in the morning 20 men (subject included) of the unit arrived back at the battle area. We just arrived in the battle area and observed around the area. The truth of the area was exposed under my eyes. Oh, I could not believe any view more lonely and terrible than this. All of the trees were burned down all around the area and I could not see any grass left on the ground. Our bunkers were destroyed and out on the ground I saw dried blood all around, still smelling the odor of the dead bodies in the air. It made me feel terrible. Also the big holes that were made by bombs made me thankful I had made it out alive. We encouraged ourselves to look for the dead and bring them to the sampans forgetting the smell of their bodies. At about 1000 hours in the morning we saw the ARVN Special Forces in that area but we ran away and hid from them along the Cha La Canal, one kilometer to the west of the battle area. We had only recovered five bodies before we were forced to move. Then we returned to the units with a sentimental feeling for all our dead comrades that were lost in the battle.

EPILOGUE: After we had returned to Trai Lon Canal the unit broke up into small groups. The regiment had already sent us three new 60mm mortar tubes a few days after the battle. We were very tired and our morale was very low, but the battalion commander gave the word that our unit (75 men) would return to Kien Phong (P) to get reinforcements and recruit new men to fight again. On the way I got hit by a booby trap so I

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had to stay back at X-12 Hospital of MR II in Hau My (V). I just stayed there one night and the next morning the 7th ARVN Division soldiers swept the area and captured me and six other VC, when discovering and destroying the hospital.

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BATTLE OF THANH PHU
11-12 MARCH 1969SCALE 1" = 215 METERS
LEGEND

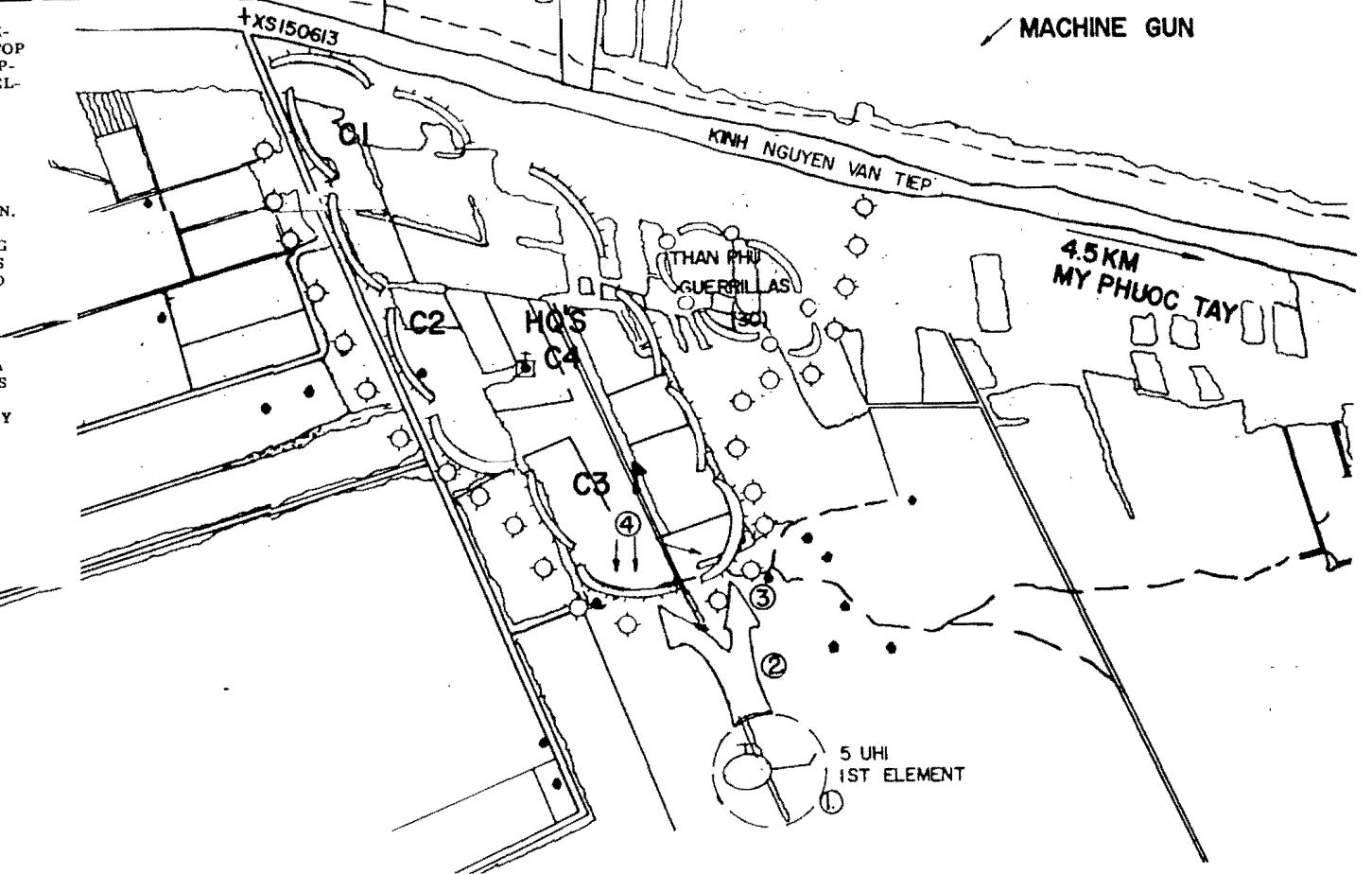
- ANTI PERSONNEL MINES AND BOOBY TRAPS
- ENEMY POSITIONS
- FRIENDLY MOVEMENT
- HOOTCH
- MACHINE GUN

① AT 1130 HOURS, 11 MARCH 1969, I COULD SEE IN THE DISTANCE SOME HELICOPTERS COMING FROM THE SOUTH. IMMEDIATELY I STOOD UP ON THE TOP OF THE BUNKER WHERE I COULD OBSERVE THEM. I COULD SEE 5 HELICOPTERS LANDING TROOPS OVER 300 METERS FROM MY POSITION. THE US HELICOPTER ASSAULTS WERE VERY FAST AND WELL DONE, ALLOWING US NO TIME TO MOVE OUT. US TROOPS CAME IN ALMOST IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE FIRST TWO HELICOPTERS DROPPED THE SMOKE GRENADES.

② THEY WERE ALL AMERICANS WITHOUT A DOUBT, BECAUSE THEY WERE TALL AND HAD HUGE BODIES. THEY STARTED TO MOVE IN OUR DIRECTION. C3 ELEMENT GOT READY TO HOLD THEIR POSITION AND HAD THEIR GUN EMPLACEMENTS READY FOR THEM. THEN I COULD SEE THEM ADVANCING THROUGH THE BOOBY TRAP AREA WHICH THE THANH PHU (V) GUERRILLAS HAD SET UP FOR OUR UNIT AS A DEFENSE. LOCAL GUERRILLAS ARE USED TO LAY BOOBY TRAPS TO PROTECT THE FLANKS OF THE BATTALION.

③ US TROOPS WERE MOVING FAST, SO I KNEW THEY DID NOT HAVE ANY IDEA THE BOOBY TRAPS WERE THERE. SUDDENLY I HEARD SOME BOOBY TRAPS EXPLODE. FIVE US SOLDIERS IN THE FRONT ELEMENT WENT DOWN AND WERE WOUNDED OR DEAD. THEN THE ENTIRE US ELEMENT STOPPED, LAY DOWN FOR FIVE MINUTES AND STARTED ADVANCING AGAIN.

④ I HEARD SOMEONE YELL 'FIRE!' TO THE RIGHT OF MY POSITION 2 SUB-MACHINE GUNS SWIFTLY SPIT OUT AMMO AT US TROOPS. MEANTIME I GAVE THE ORDER TO THE MACHINEGUNNER IN MY AREA TO FIRE ON THE SECOND PART OF THE US ELEMENT.



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SKETCH MAP
BATTLE OF THANH PHU
11-12 MARCH 1969

SCALE 1"=215 METERS

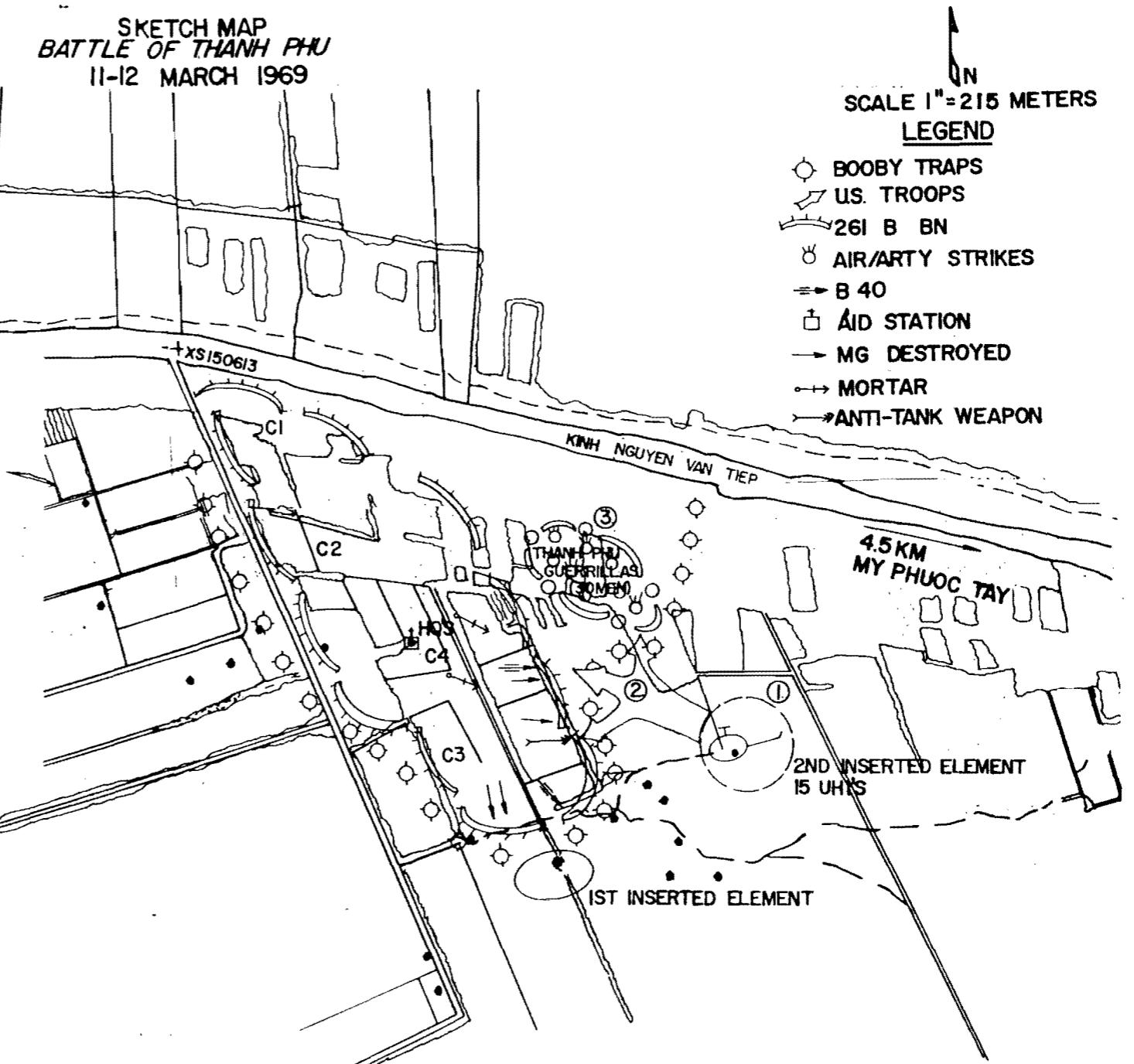
LEGEND

- BOOBY TRAPS
- △ U.S. TROOPS
- 261 B BN
- ◎ AIR/ARTY STRIKES
- B 40
- AID STATION
- MG DESTROYED
- MORTAR
- ANTI-TANK WEAPON

ABOUT 1300 HOURS THE REINFORCED ELEMENTS OF THE US WERE LANDING 15 MORE HELICOPTERS TO THE EAST OF C3 LOCATION APPROXIMATELY 350 METERS AWAY. DURING THIS TIME THE US WAS DISPERSING IN THAT AREA WHERE THE SECOND INSERTION TOOK PLACE. TWO 82MM MORTARS FROM C4 (HEAVY WEAPONS) ELEMENT WERE FIRING AWAY. I HEARD MANY MORTAR ROUNDS HIT THAT US ELEMENT, BUT THEY WERE STILL ADVANCING.

THE US 2ND INSERTED TROOP LANDING HAD STARTED TO BREAK UP INTO 3 ELEMENTS TO TRY TO PENETRATE THE BATTALION DEFENSE POSITION: 1ST ELEMENT CONCENTRATING ON C4 LOCATION; 2ND ELEMENT MOVED NORTH TO THANH PHU GUERRILLA POSITION GUARDING THE AID STATION IN THAT AREA; 3RD ELEMENT WAS HEADING SOUTHWEST TO C3 LOCATION WHERE I WAS. I ORDERED THE MACHINEGUNNER AT MY POSITION TO TURN AND FIRE AT THE 2ND INSERTED LANDING OF US TROOPS TO THE EAST. AT THIS TIME C3 AND C4 MACHINE GUN ELEMENTS WERE CONCENTRATING TO FIRE ON US ADVANCING ELEMENTS AND IT WAS EFFECTIVE BECAUSE WE HAD 'DUG IN' POSITIONS AND BUNKERS.

ABOUT 1600 - 1700 HOURS, THE C3 LOCATION WAS HIT BY HELICOPTERS. THIS TIME THEY DESTROYED TWO SUBMACHINE GUNS AND KILLED TWO WEST OF MY LOCATION. SUDDENLY THERE WAS A TERRIFIC FLASH TO THE NORTH OF C3 LOCATION NEAR THE NGUYEN VAN TIEP CANAL WHERE THE THANH PHU GUERRILLAS WERE LOCATED. NO MORE FIRING WAS COMING FROM THAT AREA. LATER AFTER THE BATTLE, I FOUND OUT THAT THIS AIR STRIKE KNOCKED OUT THE GUERRILLA POSITION RESULTING IN 30 THANH PHU GUERRILLAS KILLED.



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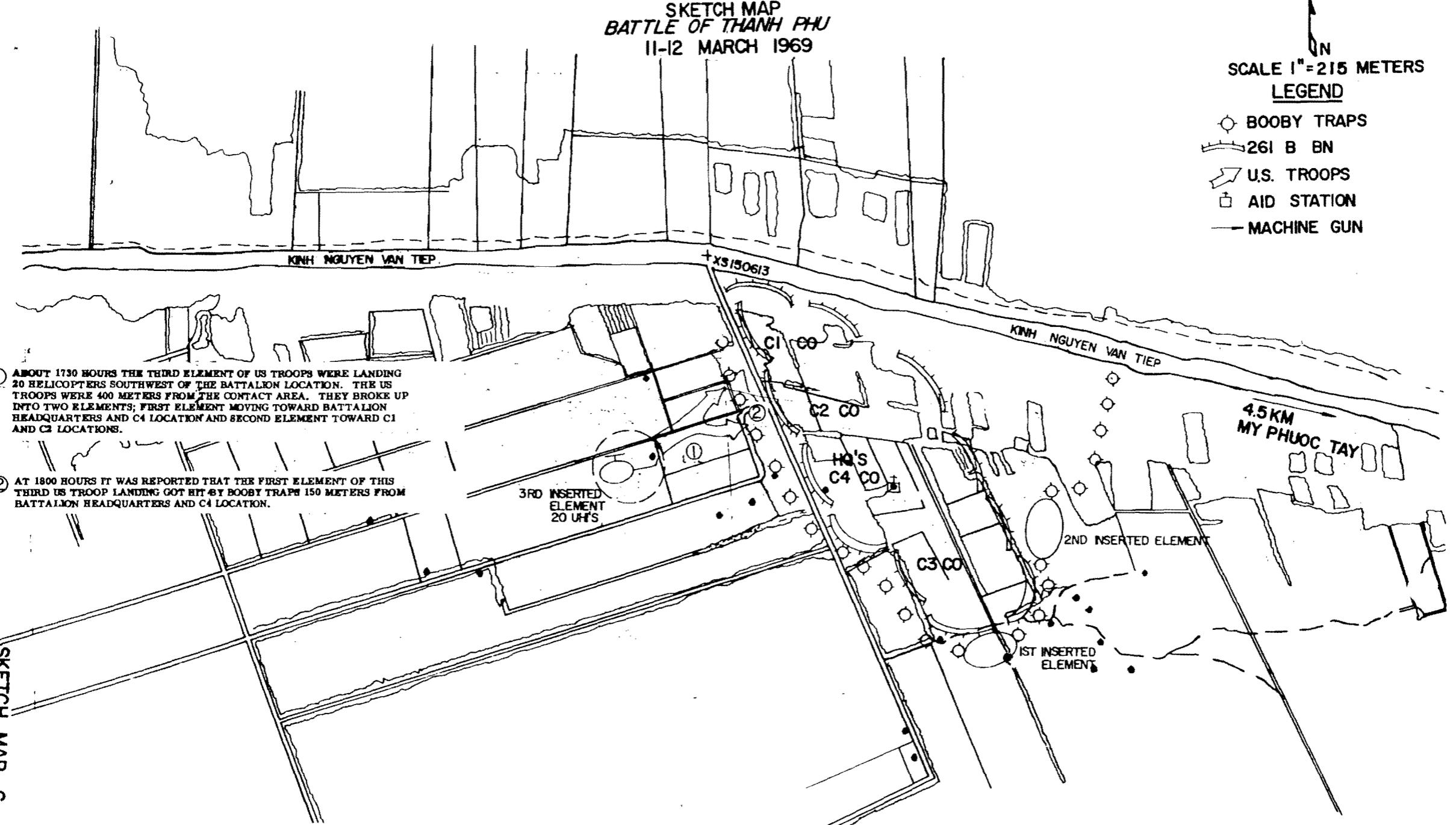
SKETCH MAP
BATTLE OF THANH PHU
11-12 MARCH 1969

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SCALE 1"=215 METERS

LEGEND

- BOOBY TRAPS
- 261 B BN
- ▲ U.S. TROOPS
- AID STATION
- MACHINE GUN



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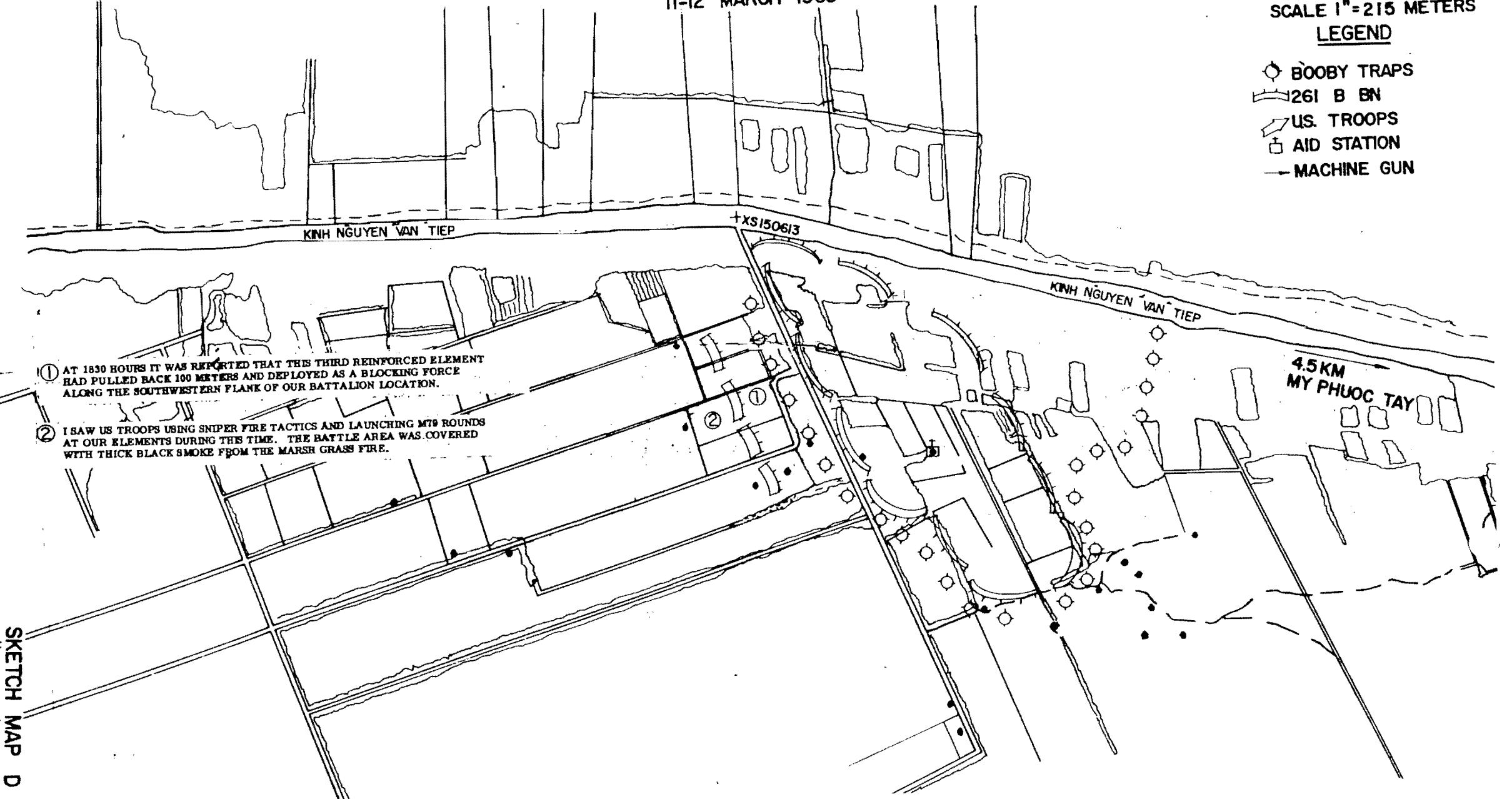
SKETCH MAP
BATTLE OF THANH PHU
11-12 MARCH 1969

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SCALE 1"=215 METERS

LEGEND

- BOOBY TRAPS
- 261 B BN
- U.S. TROOPS
- AID STATION
- MACHINE GUN



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SKETCH MAP
BATTLE OF THANH PHU
11-12 MARCH 1969

SCALE 1" = 215 METERS
LEGEND

- ◊ BOOBY TRAPS
- ▲ US TROOPS
- 261 B BN
- REINFORCED
- ◎ AIR/ARTY STRIKES
- AID STATION

KINH NGUYEN VAN TIEP

+XS150613

C1 CO

C2 CO

HQ'S

C4 CO

C3 CO

4.5 KM
MY PHUOC TAY

① ABOUT 1830 HOURS US TROOPS TO THE EAST (SECOND US TROOP LANDING) STARTED TO STRONGLY ASSAULT THE C4 HEAVY WEAPON ELEMENT LOCATED IN THE CENTER OF THE BATTALION DEFENSE FORMATION. TWO HELICOPTERS AND TWO JETS HAD ALREADY DESTROYED THE C4 HEAVY WEAPON POSITION THAT HAD BEEN BLOCKING US TROOPS COMING FROM THE EAST EARLIER. MANY VC WERE LYING AROUND DEAD OR WOUNDED IN THAT AREA. THIS CAUSED THE C1 (100 MEN) TO REINFORCE THE C4 ELEMENT WHICH WAS HIT SO BADLY AND TO CONTINUE TO PREVENT US TROOPS FROM PENETRATING THAT AREA BY ACTING AS A SCREENING FORCE. C2 HAD ONLY 40 MEN AND DID NOT REINFORCE C4. C3 ELEMENT WAS STILL HOLDING OFF US ELEMENTS TO THE SOUTH WITH SMALL ARMS FIRE.

② ABOUT 1900 HOURS THE C3 COMMANDER, BA KIET, 37, K-54 ORDERED SOME OF HIS MEN TO LOOK AROUND FOR DEAD BODIES AND HIDE THEM IN BUNKERS AND COVER OTHERS WITH CAMOUFLAGE NYLON BECAUSE IT WOULD BE DARK SOON.

SKETCH MAP E

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SKETCH MAP
BATTLE OF THANH PHU
11-12 MARCH 1969

N

SCALE 1"=215 METERS

LEGEND

- BOOBY TRAPS
- U.S. TROOPS
- 261 B BN
- AIR/ARTY STRIKES
- MOVEMENT
- STRIKE ZONE

KINH NGUYEN VAN TIEP

+XS150613

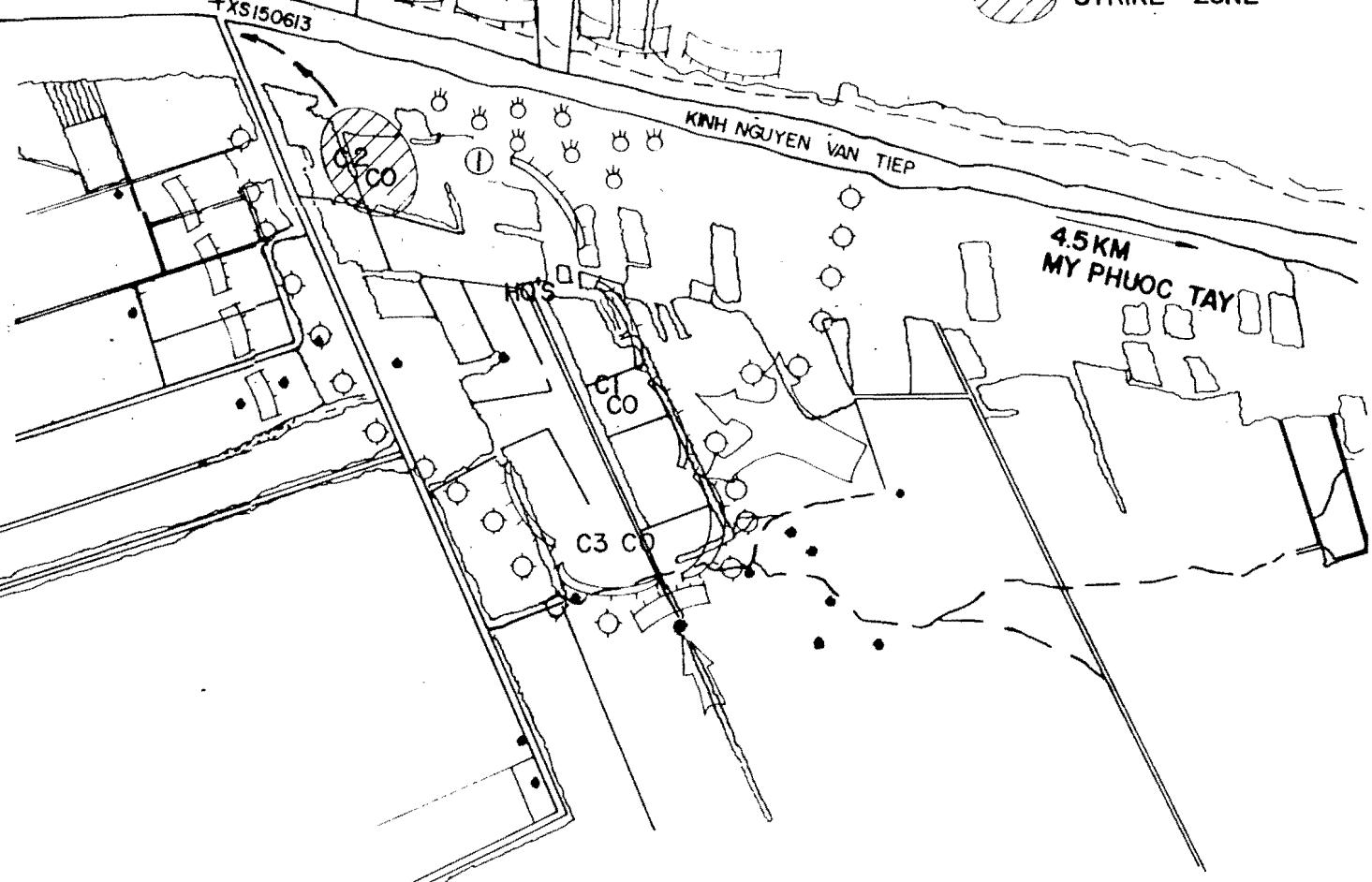
KINH NGUYEN VAN TIEP

4.5 KM
MY PHUOC TAY

① ABOUT 2000 HOURS THE US HIT THE C2 LOCATION AND SOUTHERN BANK OF NGUYEN VAN TIEP CANAL WITH AIR AND ARTILLERY STRIKES, BUT THE C2 ELEMENT HAD ALREADY PULLED BACK BEFORE THE STRIKES TO THE NORTHWEST WHERE THE C1 ELEMENT WAS PREVIOUSLY. THEY HAD ONLY LEFT A SQUAD SIZE ELEMENT IN THE AIR/ARTILLERY STRIKE ZONE TO FIRE AT US TROOPS ON THE SOUTHWESTERN FLANK.

② ALSO DURING THIS TIME I DID NOT KNOW WHAT WAS HAPPENING TO THE NORTH OF NGUYEN VAN TIEP CANAL BECAUSE WE WERE IN HEAVY CONTACT WITH US ELEMENTS TO THE EAST, BUT THE BATTALION COMMANDER, LE HA, 44, K-54 HAD ALREADY KNOWN HELICOPTERS HAD LANDED TO THE NORTH OF THIS CANAL. HE DID NOT INFORM TO OUR ELEMENT (C3) BECAUSE IT WOULD CAUSE FEAR AND LOW MORALE AMONG THE SOLDIERS. (I FOUND THIS OUT LATER AFTER THE BATTLE FROM HIM)

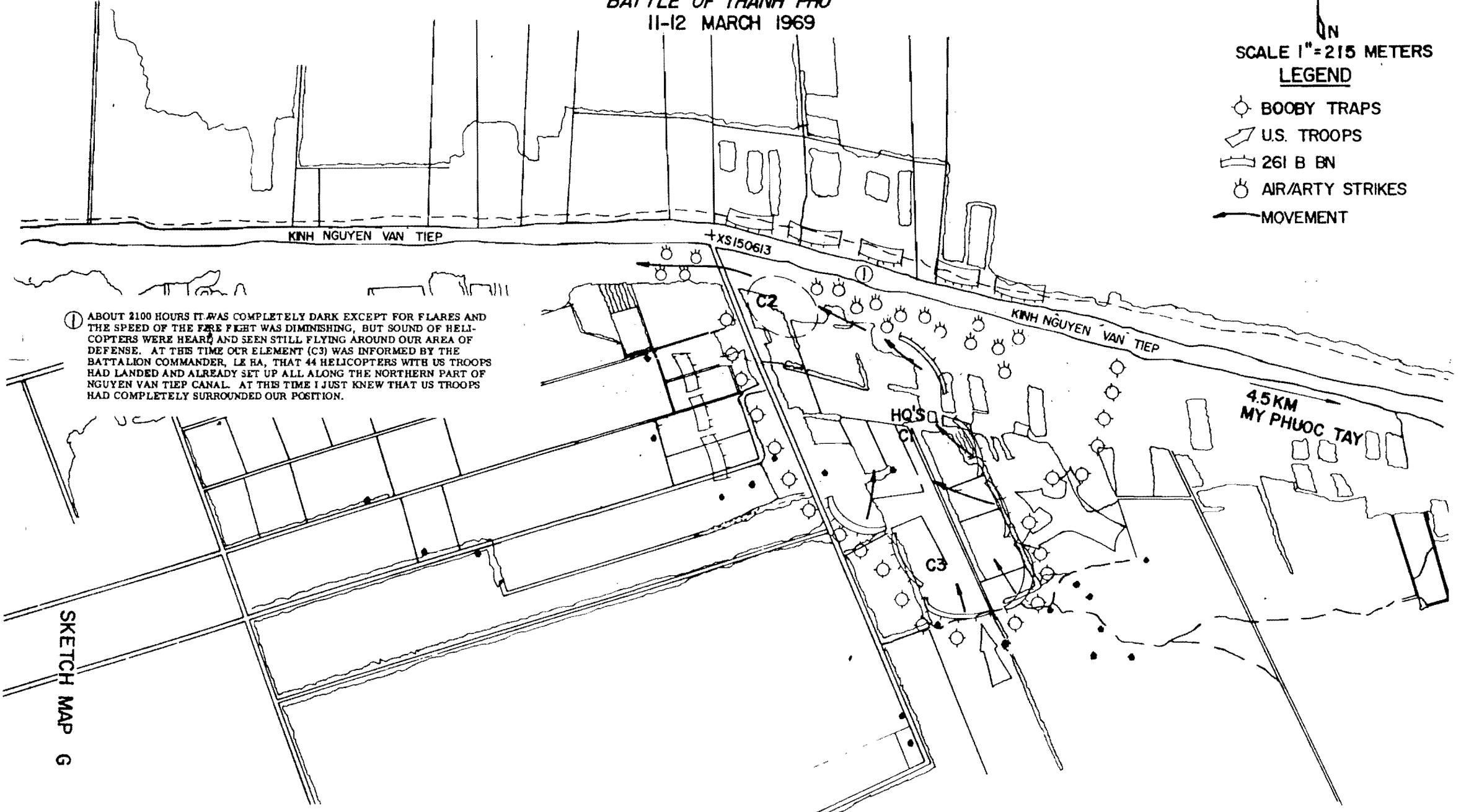
SKETCH MAP



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By TJ NARA Date 6/8/99

SKETCH MAP
BATTLE OF THANH PHU
11-12 MARCH 1969

SCALE 1"=215 METERS
LEGEND
◊ BOOBY TRAPS
→ U.S. TROOPS
— 261 B BN
○ AIR/ARTY STRIKES
← MOVEMENT



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SKETCH MAP
BATTLE OF THANH PHU
11-12 MARCH 1969

SCALE 1" = 215 METERS

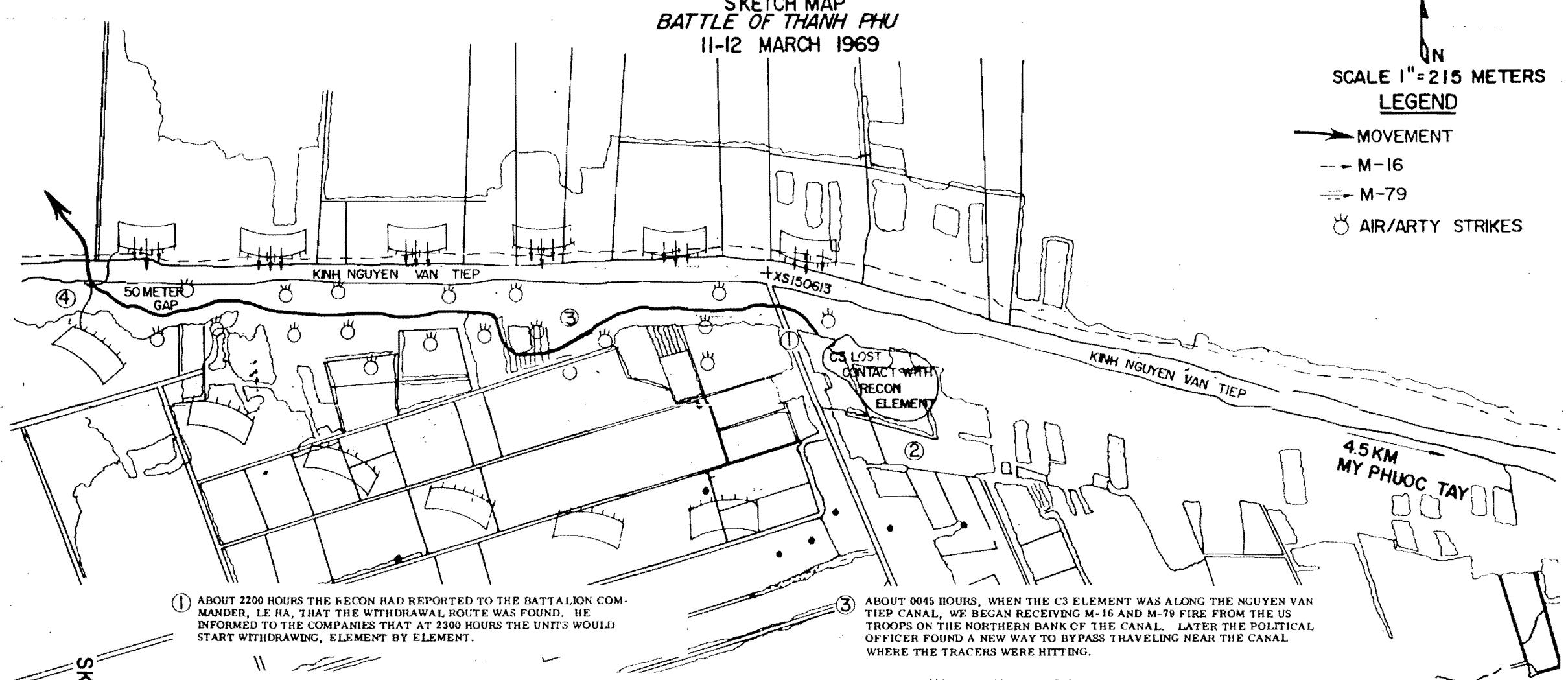
LEGEND

MOVEMENT

M-16

M-79

AIR/ARTY STRIKES



SKETCH MAP H

① ABOUT 2200 HOURS THE RECON HAD REPORTED TO THE BATTALION COMMANDER, LE HA, THAT THE WITHDRAWAL ROUTE WAS FOUND. HE INFORMED TO THE COMPANIES THAT AT 2300 HOURS THE UNITS WOULD START WITHDRAWING, ELEMENT BY ELEMENT.

③ ABOUT 0045 HOURS, WHEN THE C3 ELEMENT WAS ALONG THE NGUYEN VAN TIEP CANAL, WE BEGAN RECEIVING M-16 AND M-79 FIRE FROM THE US TROOPS ON THE NORTHERN BANK OF THE CANAL. LATER THE POLITICAL OFFICER FOUND A NEW WAY TO BYPASS TRAVELING NEAR THE CANAL WHERE THE TRACERS WERE HITTING.

② AT 2330 HOURS A RECON MEMBER FROM BATTALION HEADQUARTERS CAME DOWN TO C3 POSITION TO GIVE THE WORD THAT WE WERE TO MOVE NORTH TO NGUYEN VAN TIEP CANAL. THE STRENGTH OF OUR ELEMENT (C3) WAS VERY LOW AT THIS TIME. MANY SMALL ARMS (AK-47) WERE LYING AROUND THE BUNKERS WHERE OUR SOLDIERS LAY DEAD. WE PLACED SOME MORE OF THE DEAD IN THE BUNKERS AND COVERED SOME WITH NYLON STUFF BECAUSE US TROOPS FAIL TO CHECK ALL POSSIBLE PLACES FOR BODIES.

④ APPROXIMATELY 0100 HOURS WE FINALLY REACHED THE AREA WHERE THE BATTALION RECON ELEMENT WAS STANDING GUARD. THEY SHOWED US THE 50 METER GAP WHERE THE REST OF THE BATTALION HAD MADE IT THROUGH. THE TACTICS WE USED HERE WERE THE RECON ELEMENT SECURED EACH SIDE OF THE GAP, THE COMPANIES INFILTRATED THROUGH THE GAP IN SMALL GROUPS IN SINGLE FILE. A SMALL FORCE WAS LEFT BEHIND IN THE CONTACT AREA TO COVER THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE MAIN BODY.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Phan Xuan Quy - Headquarters Secretary, 261 B Battalion

On 11 April 1969, approximately 12 kilometers southwest of My Phuoc Tay, elements of the 7th ARVN Division discovered a VC hospital and captured a PW identified in subsequent interrogation as Phan Xuan Quy, Headquarters Secretary of the 261 B Battalion. This position is roughly equivalent to that of Battalion Adjutant. The subject is an intelligent, well educated and hard core Viet Cong. He had been wounded on five occasions in contact with ARVN elements and did not desire to rally to GVN.

Phan Xuan Quy was born in the 1st District of Saigon in 1949. He lived with his stepfather as his mother had been imprisoned during the reign of Bao Dai for reasons unknown to Quy. Quy's mother was released from prison in 1954 and died a few days after her release. According to Quy her last words to him was a request that he avenge her death and the wrongs she had suffered at the hands of the Bao Dai regime. His disaffection and dissatisfaction with the GVN and the later rallying to Viet Cong ranks can be traced to this. In 1958 Quy's stepfather died and Quy went to live with Pham Binh, a friend of his father. From 1958 to 1963 Quy attended school in Saigon. In 1963 Quy moved to the capital of Cambodia, where he attended a private school until 1966. While in this school Quy became fluent in both the French and the Cambodian languages. In January of 1966 Quy went to work for the Doc Lap newspaper, a neutralist newspaper in the capital of Cambodia. In February he joined the Viet Cong to as he stated "Fight for the country he loved so much." He attended basic training and NCO school in Bac Lien (P), Cambodia, for five months. In July of 1967 he was assigned to the VC 502d Battalion as a squad leader. In August of 1968 he was transferred to the 261 B Battalion, where he was promoted to the rank of platoon leader. In March of 1969 he was made Battalion Headquarters Secretary. On 11 and 12 March his battalion was decimated by elements of the 9th Infantry Division at Thanh Phu (V), Cai Be (D), Dinh Tuong (P), Republic of Vietnam. On 11 April 1969 he was captured by elements of the 7th ARVN Division while he was a patient in a VC hospital where he was recovering from wounds incurred from a booby trap on 10 April. He was subsequently turned over for interrogation to the 9th Infantry Division and has voluntarily provided the information concerning a contact between his unit, the 261 B Battalion, and elements of the 9th Infantry Division.

INTERROGATOR'S COMMENTS:

It is believed that the subject, as Battalion Secretary, wrote an account of the battle for the Battalion Commander, which was to be sent to the Headquarters Dong Thap I Regiment of MR II for possible preparation of a unit citation. He admitted discussing the battle with all the unit officers.

INTERROGATOR: SP5 ROBERT T. KCT,
9th MI Detachment
INTERPRETER: SSG HUYNH VAN MAI,
9th MI Detachment

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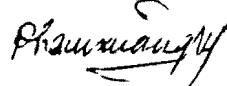
REFLECTIONS OF A PRISONER

Introduction

When it was determined that Prisoner of War Phan Xuan Quy was the Battalion Secretary of the 261 B Viet Cong Battalion, the 9th Infantry Division requested permission from the 7th ARVN Infantry Division to interrogate the prisoner. All concerned were amazed with the intelligence and knowledge which Phan Xuan Quy possessed. We therefore requested him to write a narrative of the Battle of Thanh Phu, which he did. During many meetings with the prisoner, it became apparent that the young man was also very gifted in the art of expressing himself. Consequently, he was asked if he would consider writing his reflections on becoming a prisoner of war. He readily agreed, and although what he wrote did not coincide with the expectations of the requestor, his reflections were sheer beauty, expressing his feelings with force and with clarity. Phan Xuan Quy wrote these reflections at midnight on 30 April 1969 in the 9th Infantry Division POW Compound located at Dong Tam, Republic of Vietnam.

* * * * *

"Night is falling deeper and deeper, the breeze is colder and colder, the wind is blowing into my prison camp. Perhaps today is the 19th day of my life staying in the prison. At this time it is 12 o'clock midnight. There are two soldiers standing guard at the door of my prison camp. They wear the letters M. P. on their sleeves. I feel they are well trained to stand guard awake. Outside at this time some jeeps pass by in a hurry out on the road plus the roar of artillery is heard out going from this Binh Duc Base Camp (Dong Tam). The dew drops are falling thicker and thicker, the wind is blowing harder. All of this gives me a feeling of indifference. I could not fall asleep. I sat up to light my cigarette and think deeply of my life about 'what could happen to me in the future.' I was feeling that my future is very dark. While being a soldier, I had been wounded 5 times and about 10 times escaped out of death. I don't have any grief, but this time I worry about it. I am a young man, but somehow I always find myself in trouble. As I look back and remember the day I was captured and turned into the prison camp of the Americans. Before I got in here I always thought that I would be kept in a completely dark jail in which I could not see any rays of sunlight fall into my prison and lie in handcuffs. But, everything is the opposite. This prison camp is a large area. It contains 6 barracks all of which are covered by canvas, and very clean area. I receive three meals a day. Some bystanders passing on the road outside just think that is a workers sleeping barracks. The few days that have passed, I have been given good treatment. They have given me cigarettes and anything I need. Each time they brought me in for interrogation, it was a narration of mine for them, no more and no less. I simply sat down, talking friendly. Before I got here my thinking was about the pressure and misery I would have to endure at a prison camp. Now my bad impression is replaced by the highest opinions of Americans."



PHAN XUAN QUY
Battalion Secretary
261st B Battalion

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An Account of
THE BATTLE OF THANH PHU
by
Colonel Ira A. Hunt, Jr.
Commanding Officer, 1st Brigade, 9th Infantry Division

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By TJ NARA Date 6/8/99

Intelligence information indicated that there was enemy movement northwest of Cai Lay along the major canals that run from the Plain of Reeds south into Dinh Tuong Province. Consequently, on 11 March 1969 I directed the Commanding Officer of the 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry, to insert on several targets in this area. He was given Alpha Troop, 7th Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment (Apache) to assist in his reconnaissance-in-force, and he was also programmed for the use of the 191st Assault Helicopter Company (Boomerang) to insert troops. Starting about 1100 hours the cavalry carefully reconnoitered the brigade-assigned targets utilizing CS gas to flush out the enemy, but they found no evidence of current enemy activity. Ranging out further from the assigned targets the air cavalry employed the Airborne Personnel Detector ("People Sniffer") to see if they could get readings which might indicate the presence of enemy troops. "People Sniffer" readings were sparse and only one significant reading was obtained along the Kinh Tong Doc Loc Canal, just south of the border between Kien Tuong and Dinh Tuong Provinces and about five kilometers west of the CIDG Camp at My Phuoc Tay.

Initial Insertion

The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Robert A. Sullivan, decided to air assault one platoon of Charlie Company in five slicks to check out this reading. The Cobras from "Apache" assisted in the insertion. The 2d Platoon of Charlie Company, commanded by Lieutenant Richard A. Fisher, was inserted at 1152 hours, about a kilometer south of the canal (See Sketch Map 2). As the troops were inserting the gunships sighted some enemy and fired rockets at the bunkers. The grass in the normally inundated Plain of Reeds was tinder dry and these rockets set it on fire. As you will see later, these grass fires were to have a great impact on the conduct of the battle. On insertion Lieutenant Fisher's platoon was given instructions to move north. Staff Sergeant Jantzen E. Childers, squad leader, stated the platoon moved out with three squads abreast, about 30 to 40 meters between the squads. After they had advanced about 200 meters they began to notice many Tu Dia (death field) signs. Cobras circled continuously overhead while the LOH's, flying low and courageously as they always do, were looking for VC. Now and then the Cobras would shoot, starting still more of the grass fires. There was a lot of smoke, but it was not bothersome yet because the wind was blowing to the northwest. As the platoons moved forward one of the men hit a booby trap. Luckily there were no casualties. The troops had not been fired at and although they could see the bunkers, they had seen lots of them before; they were not too concerned. The booby traps had made them cautious, however, and they decided to prep the woodline ahead with M-79 fire. When they did this, the VC fired back. Everyone hit the ground and the enemy in bunkers, no more than 15 meters away in a small canal line, opened up from the west. Fire was also coming from out of the banana grove to the east. Lieutenant Fisher called for gunships and they worked over the area. The platoon lay there for about five minutes. Then everyone got up to move forward again. Before they had gone five yards they were pinned down for the second time by heavy fire from three sides. They were running a little low on ammunition; the smoke was getting worse; the grass fire was spreading towards them; and the VC continued to shoot. About 1245 Lieutenant Fisher was wounded in the upper thigh. Nevertheless, he continued to direct the unit until he went into shock from loss of blood. The troops were still pinned down and could not move. The medic passed out from heat. It was real hell. The Cobras kept coming in and they began to withdraw. On the way out two men hit booby traps. SP4 Michael G. Allendorf died from chest wounds.

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Still another soldier hit a booby trap. By now the smoke was so bad that, unknown to the men on the ground, the Cobras couldn't see to pin down the VC effectively.

Reaction to Contact

While the men were valiantly fighting on the ground the whole apparatus of the brigade had been alerted. Major General Julian J. Ewell, Commanding General of the 9th Infantry Division, and Brigadier General Frank L. Gunn, Assistant Division Commander, were overhead. Sullivan, having assessed the situation, immediately had the 3rd Platoon of Charlie Company picked up and inserted in a LZ about 600 meters from where the fight was taking place. The Charlie Company commander had the 3rd Platoon move forward as a line of skirmishers. They moved up to behind the "hooch" (See Sketch Map 2) and laid down a base of fire trying to assist the 2d Platoon to extricate themselves, not only from the VC, but from the burning grass.

The cavalry had reconnoitered the area thoroughly by now. They said there was at least a company of VC here, which meant there could be as many as a hundred. It has not been too often lately that we have found a company of VC, since VC tactics for the past four months have been to break down into small units, platoon size at the most to avoid detection. The "jitterbug" tactics had found them, now was the time for a "pile-on." General Ewell gave instructions to go at them and made the chopper assets of the division available. I decided to pull Recondo Brigade companies from wherever we could spare them. We would stage out of My Phuoc Tay, air assault into the battle area to seal off the enemy, and then stand off and literally beat him to death with gunships, tactical air, and artillery. The major question now was where to insert in order to cut him off? It would also be nice to know how far the enemy bunker system extended? How many VC were there? What was the unit in contact? The first order of business was to cut off his escape. Troops had to be inserted quickly to the east and to the west of the area of contact south of the canal, and some troops inserted north of the canal to prevent him from swimming the canal and heading out. For the time being artillery could cover the north and the order went out to get the artillery moved into My Phuoc Tay. Air strikes were called for and the other battalions in the brigade were alerted to have companies standing by in the ready rack. The 1st Brigade had a string of successful seals under its belt, and although none of the current battalion commanders had as yet been in a large one, they were all anxious to get a piece of the action.

Encirclements South of Canal

On the ground the 2d Platoon C/2-39 started to move back, dragging the wounded with them (See Sketch Map 2). They had to leave Allendorf's body. As they crawled toward the hooch they found Lieutenant Fisher and SP4 Gerald L. Tharp, both badly wounded, in a small ditch behind the hooch. About this time the wind turned and the smoke and fire started blowing towards the south. The men had to walk through the grass fires. Mortars started coming in. Most of the small arms fire that was cutting down the men was coming from the banana grove to the northeast about 180 meters away. The VC were bold and were out in the open, so my C&C made repetitive passes around the banana grove with the door gunner letting them have it. The first time his fire was very inaccurate, but by the third pass he was pumping it into them. This kept their heads down. Down below Childers, carrying Lieutenant Fisher on his back, moved further to the rear. They reached the 3d Platoon who helped them pull in the wounded. By now they were able to collect themselves. During the move Tharp died from his booby trap wound. Another man was

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shot by small arms fire and killed. The wounded organized themselves into two groups of eight for pick-up. The slicks came in through the smoke and extracted them. One of the men was completely passed out. This was Sergeant (E5) Wray E. Walker. That afternoon Walker had raced back and forth across the open area, firing as he went, and almost single-handedly had carried most of the wounded back to the collection point. In the process he had personally killed several of the VC. However, he had worked so hard and so long in the heat and fire that he had passed out. For his outstanding action during this battle Sergeant Walker has been recommended for the Distinguished Service Cross. By now the fire was burning badly and Charlie Company had extracted two of their three killed and all of their 12 wounded. The remaining men were picked up and carried back to My Phuoc Tay.

In the initial insertion, the 2d Platoon of C/2-39 had not paid enough attention to the enemy bunkers. They didn't have flank security and as a result walked right into a trap. The enemy waited until the troops were only 10-12 meters away before opening up. Once hit, the troops deported themselves well. However, after the insertion of the rest of C/2-39, the company commander didn't grab hold of the situation. He paid too much attention to the killed and in trying to evacuate the wounded, but not enough in getting proper fire and maneuver. As brigade commander, I was sharply critical of C/2-39. Obviously, the company commander had panicked. All he could think about was pulling out of the contact area. The battalion commander made a decision to extract Charlie Company. At the time it was undoubtedly a proper decision because the company was not functioning well and the grass fires obliterated visual contact of the VC positions. However, I was adamant that C/2-39 was to be re-inserted later and pick up their share of the battle.

Major James R. Taylor, Executive Officer, 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry, was back in Fire Support Base Schroeder, the battalion CP, when the battle started. He immediately loaded Bravo Company, which was at the FSB, in the slicks of the 191st AHC and inserted them at 1415 hours about a kilometer to the east of the point of contact (See Sketch Map 3). He gave them instructions to move due north to the Tong Doc Loc Canal. Once Bravo Company was on the ground there was much confusion because as they inserted air strikes were going on just to their north.

Rather than move out in the direction of the air strikes, Bravo Company was told to move due east until they hit a north-south streamline, then to move north until they hit the main canal. They were then to move west and seal the area to prevent the VC from escaping to the east. Because of the involvement with Charlie Company, Bravo Company was allowed to move too far to the east. They were finally turned to the north, and by the time they reached the main canal it was around 1700 hours. When they began to push west they did not hit much fire but there were bunkers and assorted booby traps. The further west they got, the more dense the booby traps became and the slower was their progress. Nevertheless, it was certain that the VC did not and could not get out to the east. Around 1730 hours several well-placed air strikes clobbered the enemy to their front and greatly eased their situation.

A/2-39 had also been alerted to move and the company, commanded by Captain Williford, was inserted south of the river with ten slick-loads of troops at approximately 1511 hours (See Sketch Map 3). The assault helicopter company personnel had indicated that because of intense small

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arms fire there were only four LZ's where they would consider landing troops. The closest LZ to the canal was picked, but as it turned out this was much further south than desired. This fact proved instrumental in preventing Alpha Company from reaching the Tong Doc Loc Canal in a timely fashion. Once inserted, they were directed to move on a 320 degree azimuth, almost due north, until they hit the main canal, and then to set up a block to prevent the enemy from moving to the west. Captain Williford moved his two platoons forward in four columns, about 25 meters between columns, and 100 meters between platoons. At first they received only sporadic small arms fire. About 1800 hours, while moving across an open field, they drew heavy machine gun fire from the north. Tracers ricocheted everywhere. Captain Williford held up the 1st Platoon and sent the 2d Platoon to the northeast to maneuver around the machine gun. However, this platoon ran into heavy AK fire from a woods near the bend of the canal and could progress no farther. The 1st Platoon started to move northward and again drew machine gun fire, this time joined by a few AK's. About this time 60mm mortar fire began to plunk in around their location. Fifteen mortar rounds hit, wounding three soldiers. Alpha Company was getting little air support because smoke completely covered the area. Cobras had to fly blind. However, there were a few gutsy pilots who unhesitatingly went down into the smoke. One light fire team from Apache was especially effective.

By 1511 hours the three available companies of the 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry had been inserted south of the canal. The eastward and westward escape routes were in the process of being cut off. However, the central portion of the battle area, where C/2-39 had made the initial contact, was open. I decided to put the next available company into this slot. C/6-31, located at FSB Moore, was available and was picked up by CH-47's, offloaded at My Phuoc Tay at about 1630 hours and shortly thereafter inserted by slicks into the contact area at exactly the same spot where C/2-39 had been extracted several hours earlier (See Sketch Map 3). The company, commanded by Captain George Maudlin, was directed to go due north and upon closing on the enemy position to spread out and attempt to link up with B/2-39 on the east. As they moved forward, they had a casualty from a booby trap in the open field. Captain Maudlin said that Chicom booby traps were everywhere. They were not the grenade type but plastic, filled with nails and ball bearings. The VC opened up with AK's around 1730 hours from the right front as they approached the woodline south of the canal. No sooner had the VC fired than an air strike with napalm came right in on the VC. The company RTO saw the enemy engulfed in flames. About this time they also came upon some equipment dropped by C/2-39, when they had been surprised by machine gun fire. By now the grass fires had subsided somewhat. There was dark charred ash everywhere. The fire that hampered everyone performed one useful function. It burned up the tripwires of the booby traps, rendering many ineffective. They began drawing fire from their left front about 1830. This time a machine gun opened up, pinning them down and slowing their movement. Captain Maudlin directed the company to spread out and form a cordon and they began making their way to the east and to the west to link up with the adjacent units.

Artillery Support

As mentioned, I directed the artillery to displace to My Phuoc Tay where they could insure timely and accurate fire on the encirclement as it developed. Therefore, at 1403 hours three tubes of Battery B, 1-11th Artillery (105mm) were given march orders at Fire Support Base Moore. These tubes were

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laid and ready to fire at My Phuoc Tay at 1450 hours, after a 16 kilometer road march. When the series of air strikes that were going on were completed, the howitzers began firing at 1515 hours and continued in close support of the units in contact until 0130 hours. After that time, the friendly troops had closed in too tightly for supporting fires and only blocking fires and illumination rounds were continued throughout the early morning. As the enemy attempted to push out to the west three tubes of the 1-84th Artillery located at My Da were able to bring effective blocking fires and illumination over the area. The 1-11 initially fired north of the main canal and walked their fires south until they were interdicting the woods adjacent to the canal (See Sketch Map 1). At this time they moved the fires east and west along the nipa palm on both sides of the canal. The artillery fires were interrupted often during the afternoon because the gun-target line was exactly the axis of the air strikes, all of which were brought along the southern portion of the canal. The smoke from the grass fires to the north and south blanketed the area, making observation of aircraft extremely difficult. I know for a fact that Lieutenant Colonel William L. Hauser, the Battalion Commander of the 1-11, had to check fires several times as we saw Cobras emerging from the smoke in the line of artillery fires. Although the 688 rounds fired were generally far less than that normally expected in an encirclement, the ultimate tightness of the circle and the situation prevailing mitigated against more extensive coverage. Both the commanders and the infantrymen were well satisfied with the support, which amounted to about 171 rounds per tube of 105mm, which in actuality is above the 9th Division's 150 round average per tube for this type of contact.

Tactical Air Support

The first Air Force tactical air strike was put in at 1405 hours about 100 meters south of the large canal and several hundred meters to the northeast of where C/2-39 was in heavy contact. This was a pre-planned target which was diverted to the in-contact mission. Subsequently, five additional, immediate air strikes were placed (See Sketch Map 1). The second strike was also needed to extricate C/2-39 which was hung up by fire coming from a banana grove to the northeast. Because of the smoke and the inability of the troops to identify themselves clearly with smoke grenades, there was hesitancy both on the part of the ground troops as well as the FAC to put the strikes in too close. However, the FAC in this case was, in my opinion, overly cautious and took too long to get the second strike placed. In the meantime while the FAC was getting oriented, the gunships were working the area over. As the afternoon wore on, the ability of the FAC and tac air to hit the target improved measurably. The artillery was located almost due east at My Phuoc Tay. Since all air strikes had to go in on the artillery gun-target line, the two could not be utilized simultaneously. The air strikes also made it difficult for the gunships to operate during the early part of the afternoon. The air strike put in at 1740 by Blade 03 under the guidance of Major Ramon Medina (callsign Tamale 02) was right on target. Through binoculars I could see four VC completely engulfed by napalm. On the second sortie Apache saw eight men wiped out, so we know that at least 12 enemy were killed and certainly there were many more that we could not see. The last air strike of the day went in at 1800 hours, again on target to the east. The fact that the wind was blowing to the northwest made it extremely difficult to put air strikes into the west. By 1900 hours we knew the enemy was trying to escape to the west and we hoped to clobber him at night. However, we had trouble getting "Spooky," who was VNAF, on the "push" and the Air Force would not put in air strikes without flare ship coverage. As a substitute, 155 howitzers from My Da about 10 kilometers

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to the west were used to block the enemy. The sketch attached shows the location of the air strikes and it can be seen that they were very effective along the nipa next to the canal but did not move inland enough to take out the machine gun positions. Unquestionably, the air strikes should have been closer to the troops in contact but the pilots stated they just couldn't chance it because of the smoke and highly fluid situation. In retrospect we probably could have used six more air strikes to great advantage.

Gunship Support

Chief Warrant Officer Robert Beck, 9th Aviation Battalion, a fire team leader of a pair of Cobras on station during the afternoon, for one doesn't agree with the last statement. He felt that the air strikes were brought in too soon. It was his experience that troops in close contact needed gunship support. I couldn't agree with CWO Beck more, but unfortunately we've found out through experience that gunship rockets just won't take out a heavily bunkered position and that is what the troops were up against. CWO Beck stated, as did the tac air pilots and FAC's, that he had a hard time seeing troop position markings because of the smoke. Consequently, most of the afternoon he was unsure exactly where the troops were located. He thought at the beginning of the battle that there were too many light fire teams on station at one time and that with the air strikes and artillery that the area was very congested. When one of the units was in extremely heavy contact, he swept in after one sortie of a tac air mission, plastered the bunker area, and got out of the way before the second sortie. He stated that he couldn't hang in close to the target like he wanted because of the smoke.

Delta Troop, 3-5 Cav was scrambled late in the afternoon from the 2d Brigade area in Kien Hoa Province to provide support for the Boomerangs (191st AHC) because they had had one chopper shot down and two others with mechanical problems. Delta Troop had a hard time providing proper gunship coverage to the slicks during insertions because of the smoke. However, all LZ's used during the day were cold.

The most decisive support by the gunships, in my opinion, occurred about 2200 hours when a light fire team was making a run parallel to the canal from west to east just as "Spooky" dropped a flare. The flare dropped right over some VC moving out hurriedly to the west, catching them by surprise. It was just as light as day. The Cobra pilot, with instant reflexes, cut loose with his mini-guns. It looked to me as if he cut down at least ten VC. Shortly thereafter A/4-39, north of the canal, complained that they were being shot up. The acting company commander, First Lieutenant John L. Roberson III, just as calm as could be, stated that he had had several men wounded and he himself had a slight wound. In reality he lost two fingers in the mishap. Although the troops to the north of the canal were quite concerned about this fire, the Cobras flew very carefully parallel to and south of the canal and for the rest of the evening utilized rockets only, giving them a better point target capability. In my opinion, between 2200 and 2230 the gunships were decisive in slowing down the enemy pullout and in creating VC casualties. As I review the battle, I don't believe that the gunships got full credit for all of the VC they hit. This was the first time in my memory that we had kept gunships so late at night. By the time they left station about 2330, they had made a decisive contribution.

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By TJ NARA Date 6/8/99Encirclements North of Canal

Three companies had been inserted south of the canal and the enemy was well on its way to being cut off to the east and the west as well as to the south. Past experience has shown that when faced with a situation like this the VC unhesitatingly take to the water and try to escape away from the US troops. In almost every contact I have been involved with, both in Long An and Dinh Tuong Provinces, the VC have been located on a stream. US forces tend to think of streams as obstacles, but the VC tend to think of them as communication routes and escape routes.

Therefore, I decided to insert and seal the northern side of the Tong Doc Loc Canal (See Sketch Map 4). The first unit to be inserted north of the canal was A/4-39 at 1720 hours. They were inserted without mishap in the central portion of the battle area opposite the machine gun locations to the south. The unit moved out sharply to the south encountering no booby traps. At 1920 hours several hundred meters north of the main canal they engaged and killed five VC and captured two AK's as they moved to seal the canal.

Next to be inserted on the north was A/6-31 who air assaulted about a "click" to the west of A/4-39 at 1742 hours (See Sketch Map 4). According to Sergeant Thomas A. Cashmire, RTO for the 1st Platoon, they were told to head east until they hit a "small blue" and then to move south to the "big blue." This they did. As they monitored the radio net, they could hear the intense firing and maneuvering by other elements. On their way east they engaged two VC moving parallel to them. They didn't get them and a light fire team was called in. The light fire team zapped them good. As they came to the "small blue," there was a "hooch" which had VC writing all over it--propaganda of some sort. The water was chest high as they crossed the small canal. They began to move south until they hit the big canal where they proceeded to link up with the 4th Battalion, 39th Infantry to the east. It was then about 2000 hours. Sergeant Cashmire says that there was firing on the south of the river all the time. He and the men were getting excited. They were anxious to get set up, and once they did everyone fired across the river. When they opened up, the VC to the south really hit back. This went on and off for a long time. At about 2200 hours the Cobras started firing south of the canal. Illumination was overhead. All of a sudden the Cobras started firing on their side. The gunships were trying to get the VC who were near the canal's edge. He remembered shouting on the radio that the Cobras were shooting up their side of the bank. Once the Cobras had been warned, the firing stopped immediately.

C/4-39 was inserted just at dark, 1912 hours to be exact, to the east of A/4-39 (See Sketch Map 4). They were given instructions by Lieutenant Colonel David H. Hackworth, Battalion Commander of the 4th Battalion, 39th Infantry, who was in charge of all troops north of the canal, to move south to the canal and to link up with A/4-39 and with B/2-39 south of the canal. Captain Gordon D. DeRoos, the company commander, moved his 80-man company in three columns about 75 meters apart. Everything was uneventful until they hit the river and moved to the west to attempt to link up with "Alert" (A/4-39). About this time "Spooky" came on station, illuminating the area, which made movement more difficult because they were not set in position. They linked up with "Alert" Company very easily. Captain DeRoos initially set men up in strong points 15 meters apart but he found the area too large and re-established four-man strong points 50-60 meters apart. During this time, Lieutenant Colonel Hackworth was overhead,

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getting his companies linked together to the north and tied to the units to the south. He had very little trouble tying his companies north of the river together, but C/4-39 was not exactly matched up with B/2-39 south of the canal. Finally, with the use of M-79 illumination and strobe lights, a positive linkage was made. About 2300 hours the 2d Platoon of Charlie Company saw enemy groups moving out to the west. The first group of six VC was engaged and at least half of them struck down. Immediately following, a group of three or four was seen in the illumination of the Spooky aircraft and fire was brought to bear on them. The VC were running close to the river, and they were observed moving to the west in small groups until about 0200 when the flare ship went off station. After that there was not much action.

Reenforcing South of the Canal

By 2000 hours three companies had also been inserted north of the canal and they were well on their way toward the canal's northern edge and a complete link-up to insure that none of the VC could escape northward across the canal. With evening approaching, it was obvious that the enemy south of the canal was trying to break out. Three companies just could not possibly cover the required two to three kilometers of seal and it was obvious that additional units would have to be inserted. A/3-39 in mid-afternoon was 20 kilometers away, broken down into six ambush patrols in the vicinity of Vinh Kim. They were alerted in the field about 1600 and hooked into My Phuoc Tay with about 50 personnel at 1915 hours. They immediately went into a PZ configuration and were picked up and inserted in the area of contact behind C/6-31 at 2031 hours (See Sketch Map 5). Lieutenant Seth W. Collins, the company commander, went on the ground prior to insertion to talk to Captain Maudlin, the company commander of C/6-31, to get a picture of the situation. C/6-31 was taking a lot of enemy fire. A/2-39 with whom A/3-39 (Pistol) was supposed to link up with on the west was over a kilometer and a half distant at that time. There were grass fires everywhere. A/3-39 moved northward until they hit the position of C/6-31. They then were passed to the west along C/6-31's perimeter. They moved west to a stream line which they crossed and started northwest across an open field.

When they had gone several hundred meters, the point man saw something moving in the treeline to their north (See Sketch Map 5). Two VC were observed to be running. The troops opened up on them, killing them. At this time the whole company dropped to the ground and the VC opened fire simultaneously. Lieutenant Collins says the fire was fantastic, the best VC fire that he had encountered. The VC were very disciplined. It was all grazing fire and extremely intense. Three men were hit in the legs before they could hit the ground. There was no cover. No dikes. They were out in the open. For the moment A/3-39 returned the fire as best they could. However, they immediately got calls from 2d Platoon of A/2-39 to the north, stating that they were being fired into. It was obvious that the VC were between the right flank of the 2d Platoon, A/2-39, and A/3-39. Collins decided to withdraw and regroup. On the way back AK's (green tracers) opened up on them from the northeast. The men crawled back at least 150 yards. From then on out sporadic firing continued. As they were regrouping, they could hear A/2-39 on the radio. They had hit some barbed wire and booby traps, wounding one man. About that time machine guns from the north opened up on A/2-39. Lieutenant Colonel Hackworth asked "Pistol Alpha Six" to move. Major Taylor, Lieutenant Colonel Sullivan's Exec, arrived about that time and he and Lieutenant Collins

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talked it over. They didn't know how they were going to link up with A/2-39, which was over one kilometer to the west. Major Taylor recommended they move several hundred meters to the north and as far west as possible. With this, Lieutenant Collins sent one element north along the stream bank and when they got to the intersection of the small east-west blue they moved northwest, across the open field, trying to block VC movement to the west from the area where intense machine gun fire had been forthcoming (See Sketch Map 6).

Captain Maudlin, C/6-31, remembers discussing the ground situation with Lieutenant Collins, A/3-39. Sometime after A/3-39 had moved out to the west, AK-47's opened up throughout the middle of the contact area and a real gunfight started. Although it was "hot" in his area, the majority of the enemy fire from three or four machine guns was directed at A/3-39. He remembers the situation was made very difficult because the enemy was between A/3-39 and A/2-39. A/3-39 had three men hit. From about 2200 hours on, Captain Maudlin said that there was a small enemy group which was reconning the area. Captain Maudlin knew that the VC recon element was looking for a way out and although his unit tried to hit them, they could not get any bodycount. Fighting continued at a heavy rate of fire until about 0100. In summing it up, Maudlin said it was a hell of a fight, with the mass of booby traps and the intense enemy fire (See Sketch Map 6).

About 2100 hours C/2-39 was re-inserted back into the same area from which they had been extracted earlier in the afternoon. They moved to take their position in the seal between C/6-31 and B/2-39 (See Sketch Map 5).

About 2300 hours, Major Taylor, who was acting as ground commander for all of the troops south of the canal, started what was in reality a heroic walk around the perimeter. He trod through booby trap fields and took a very real chance of being shot by either friendly or enemy troops. He states that there was a definite link in the east between B/2-39 south of the canal and C/4-39 to the north, as well as between B/2-39, C/2-39, and A/6-31 (See Sketch Map 6). When he got to A/3-39, Lieutenant Collins had just finished withdrawing after having some men wounded and was regrouping. After the wounded were dusted off, Major Taylor suggested that Lieutenant Collins move his people to the north and northwest in order to extend the perimeter as far as possible. As noted previously, Lieutenant Collins did just that, extending the perimeter another 700 meters to the west. However, he did not make contact with A/2-39.

After Captain Williford's western unit had received mortar fire and his platoon on the east had run into machine gun fire and had been caught in a crossfire between A/3-39 and the VC, Captain Williford brought his two platoons together and again prepared to move out to the Tong Loc Loc Canal. At that time, 2000 hours, the friendly forces on the north side of the canal opened fire and maintained a rapid rate of fire for eight to ten minutes. Around 2200 hours the gunships expended their entire load on a bunker line running east to west. Following the gunship strike, both platoons moved forward approximately 100 meters and again drew immediate machine gun fire. Artillery was also adjusted into the bunker line. A second gunship strike was called in around the same area and again most of the rockets were on target. One of the gunships took several hits from one of the bunker positions. Booby traps were encountered and a claymore mine was used to clear a path through the mine fence and booby trap area. A/2-39 moved another 50 meters and encountered another booby trap fence. As they were

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setting up another claymore, "Spooky" (an AF flare ship) came up on station and his first flare was right on the treeline. Captain Williford's men spotted nine VC, three of which were carrying a wounded man (See Sketch Map 6). Immediately the VC were engaged with small arms and M-79's. They think they got them all. A/2-39 again drew light AK fire from the northwest wood line. Nevertheless, they pushed on and at about 0120 hours reached the major canal. Captain Williford then stationed his people 10 to 15 meters apart to the south and southeast, hoping to meet up with A/3-39. However, the distance between the units was too great and a firm link-up with A/3-39 was not made. However, a positive link-up was made with A/6-31 to the north of the river and except for a small portion south of the canal the six kilometer seal was complete (See Sketch Map 6).

Gunships were on station until about midnight and proved particularly effective in interdicting enemy movements and giving support to the troops. I personally had never seen such a fire fight at night as that which occurred about 2100 hours. My troops at Fire Support Base Moore, approximately 11 kilometers away, watched from roof tops. An area a couple of kilometers square was almost completely interlaced with tracers. Although the guns were spewing destruction, the patterns of the varied tracers reminded one of colored lace work. The gunships silenced at least three enemy machine guns that evening.

Policing the Battlefield

It had been a hard battle. In the early morning a sweep was started south of the canal. Captain Williford swept the contact area to the east, uncovering eight bodies hidden in the tall grass and Chicom machine gun ammunition, uniforms and documents. As the sweep progressed, numerous blood trails were spotted and five additional bodies were uncovered. A/3-39 started to move again at 0400. The fog was heavy. They ran right into the middle of an enemy base camp which was heavily bunkered. Later in the morning, A/3-39 linked up with A/2-39 and they swept east until they met with C/6-31. There were Chicom grenades everywhere. It looked like a minefield. A/3-39 destroyed six grenades, but by this time they had had enough of the minefield so they got back to the treeline and followed a path south to the PZ. Captain Maudlin's troops, C/6-31, swept along the north-south canal to his west where there were many booby traps on mounds near the bunkers. In the grassy area where C/2-39 had received such brutal punishment they found at least 25 RPG tail fins. They also found US type cartridges for a machine gun, an indication that one of our 60's had been pouring it back on the VC. Again booby traps and burnt out grass were everywhere. The sweep was anything but easy, and afterward the troops moved south and most of them were picked up by the slicks and deposited at My Phuoc Tay from where they were "hooked" or convoyed back to their bases.

To the north of the canal Sergeant Cashmire states that A/6-31 started to move back the way they came about 1100 hours. On the way out the lead element saw two VC and killed them. When they got to the PZ, they set up a perimeter defense for themselves and the two companies of the 4th Battalion, 39th Infantry. As the 4th Battalion, 39th Infantry moved to the PZ, they saw many bunkers and fighting positions but they had seen very few Charlies north of the river. Hooks came in and transported the 4th Battalion, 39th Infantry back to Fire Support Base Danger.

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The sweep of the area turned out to be very disappointing. I expected at least a hundred bodycount but a total of 72 including the 12 wiped out by the Air Force were reported. Only seven weapons were picked up. It was obvious that the troops didn't police the area properly. The troops were so concerned about the booby traps that most of the time they just didn't get off the trails and the junior leaders were reluctant to push their men into areas where they might be killed just to tidy up the battlefield. I know for a fact, for example, that two mortars were discovered by the CIDG in the area on the 13th of March. It's a tough trade-off, possible weapons and bodycount for possible booby trap casualties.

Communications

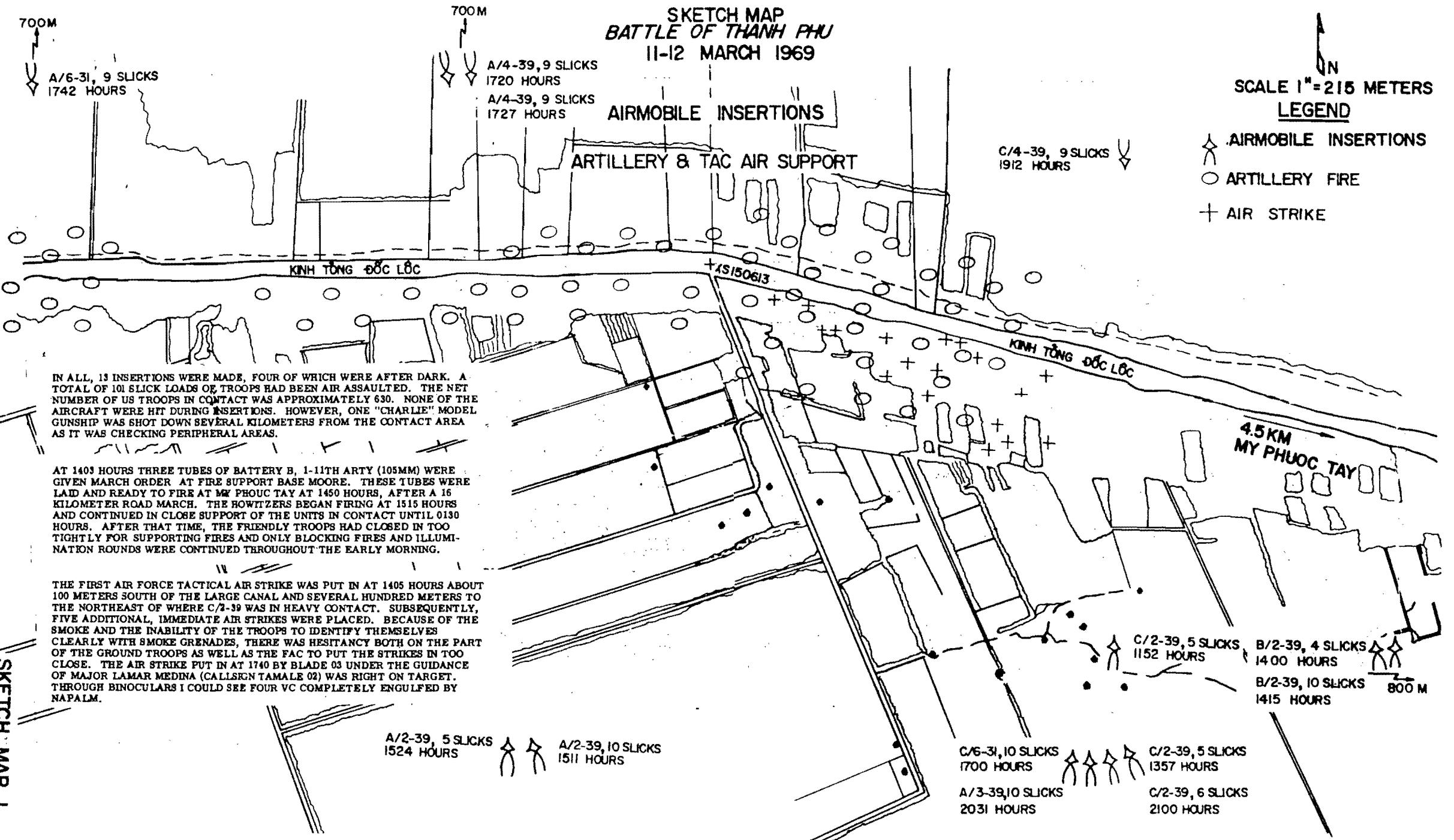
Communications-wise, the troops showed a tremendous versatility by moving to another unit's command push while utilizing their own callsigns. South of the blue there were elements of three separate battalions, all utilizing the 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry push. Whereas, north of the blue, there were two battalions under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Hackworth using the 4th Battalion, 39th Infantry push. Once the insertion to the north was completed, I controlled both air and artillery strikes to insure that both battalion commanders were completely aware of the situation. It really paid off to have Lieutenant Colonel Peterson, CO of the 6th Battalion, 31st Infantry, run the staging area at My Phuoc Tay. The Hooks were coming in continuously depositing troops which were then loaded into slicks for air assault into the combat area. "Pete" kept things sorted out and by utilizing his command push I freed the other two pushes of most of the logistical problems. The C&C console with two stations just could not hack the traffic and we had to have two PRC-25's operating all the time just to monitor the three battalion nets and to use the brigade command net. Both "Spooky" and the air cav reported to Lieutenant Colonel Sullivan on the 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry net. For in-contact support the air cav got on the company frequencies to get specific instructions. Without good communications at the company level the link-up of units would not have been possible.

Conclusions

All in all the battle had been conducted most satisfactorily. Elements of four battalions had participated on the ground. Thirteen insertions had been made, four after dark. Tac air, artillery, and gunships had been used with great finesse and a seal six kilometers long had been effected, with eyeball to eyeball contact established by all elements except A/2-39 and A/3-39 in the southwest. The battalion and small unit commanders had performed extremely well. Except for the initial casualties when three men were killed and 12 men wounded, only eight additional personnel had been wounded. At least 72 VC had been killed. Personnel for the most part had acted extremely professional. The bravery and guts of the individual soldier was extraordinary. He forced himself to close through smoke and grass fires and devilish booby trap fields, mostly at night, with a well entrenched enemy and against heavy small arms and automatic weapons fire.

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SKETCH MAP
BATTLE OF THANH PHU
11-12 MARCH 1969

INITIAL CONTACT

N

SCALE 1"=215 METERS
LEGEND

- ↗ AIRMOBILE INSERTIONS
- ◇ ANTI PERSONNEL MINES AND BOOBY TRAPS
- ENEMY FIRING POSITIONS
- DIRECTION OF FRIENDLY MOVEMENT
- SEQUENCE OF ACTIONS

KINH TONG DOC LOC

+XS150613

KINH TONG DOC LOC

4.5 KM
MY PHUOC TAYC/2-39, 5 SLICKS
1152 HOURSC/2-39, 4 SLICKS
1357 HOURS

MG

(1) EVERYONE HIT THE GROUND AND THE ENEMY IN BUNKERS, NO MORE THAN 15 METERS AWAY IN A SMALL CANAL LINE, OPENED UP FROM THE WEST. FIRE WAS ALSO COMING FROM OUT OF THE BANANA GROVE TO THE EAST. LIEUTENANT FISHER CALLED FOR GUNSHIPS AND THEY WORKED OVER THE AREA. THE PLATOON LAY THERE FOR ABOUT FIVE MINUTES. THEN EVERYONE GOT UP TO MOVE FORWARD AGAIN. BEFORE THEY HAD GONE FIVE YARDS THEY WERE PINNED DOWN FOR THE SECOND TIME BY HEAVY FIRE FROM THREE SIDES. THEY WERE RUNNING A LITTLE LOW ON AMMUNITION; THE SMOKE WAS GETTING WORSE; THE GRASS FIRE WAS SPREADING TOWARDS THEM; AND THE VC CONTINUED TO SHOOT.

(2) SULLIVAN, HAVING ASSESSED THE SITUATION, IMMEDIATELY HAD THE 3D PLATOON OF CHARLIE COMPANY PICKED UP AND INSERTED IN A LZ ABOUT 600 METERS FROM WHERE THE FIGHT WAS TAKING PLACE. CHARLIE COMPANY COMMANDER HAD THE 3D PLATOON MOVE FORWARD AS A LINE OF SKIRMISHERS. THEY MOVED UP TO BEHIND THE HOOCH AND LAID DOWN A BASE OF FIRE TRYING TO ASSIST THE 2D PLATOON TO EXTRICATE THEMSELVES, NOT ONLY FROM THE VC, BUT FROM THE BURNING GRASS.

(3) ON THE GROUND THE 2D PLATOON C/2-39 STARTED TO MOVE BACK, DRAGGING THE WOUNDED WITH THEM. ABOUT THIS TIME THE WIND TURNED AND THE SMOKE AND FIRE STARTED BLOWING TOWARDS THE SOUTH. THE MEN HAD TO WALK THROUGH THE GRASS FIRES. MORTARS STARTED COMING IN. THEY REACHED THE 3D PLATOON WHO HELPED THEM PULL IN THE WOUNDED. BY NOW THEY WERE ABLE TO COLLECT THEMSELVES. DURING THE MOVE THARP DIED FROM HIS BOOBY TRAP WOUND. ANOTHER MAN WAS SHOT BY SMALL ARMS FIRE AND KILLED. THE WOUNDED ORGANIZED THEMSELVES INTO TWO GROUPS OF EIGHT FOR PICK-UP. THE SLICKS CAME IN THROUGH THE SMOKE AND EXTRACTED THEM.

Authority AND 873541
By TJ NARA Date 6/8/99SKETCH MAP
BATTLE OF THANH PHU
11-12 MARCH 1969ENCIRCLEMENT SOUTH OF
THE TONG DOC LOC CANAL
AS OF 1800

SCALE 1"=215 METERS

LEGEND

- ↗ AIRMOBILE INSERTIONS
- ◇ ANTI PERSONNEL MINES AND BOOBY TRAPS
- ENEMY FIRING POSITIONS
- DIRECTION OF FRIENDLY MOVEMENT
- SEQUENCE OF ACTIONS
- HOOTCH
- 82 MM MORTAR

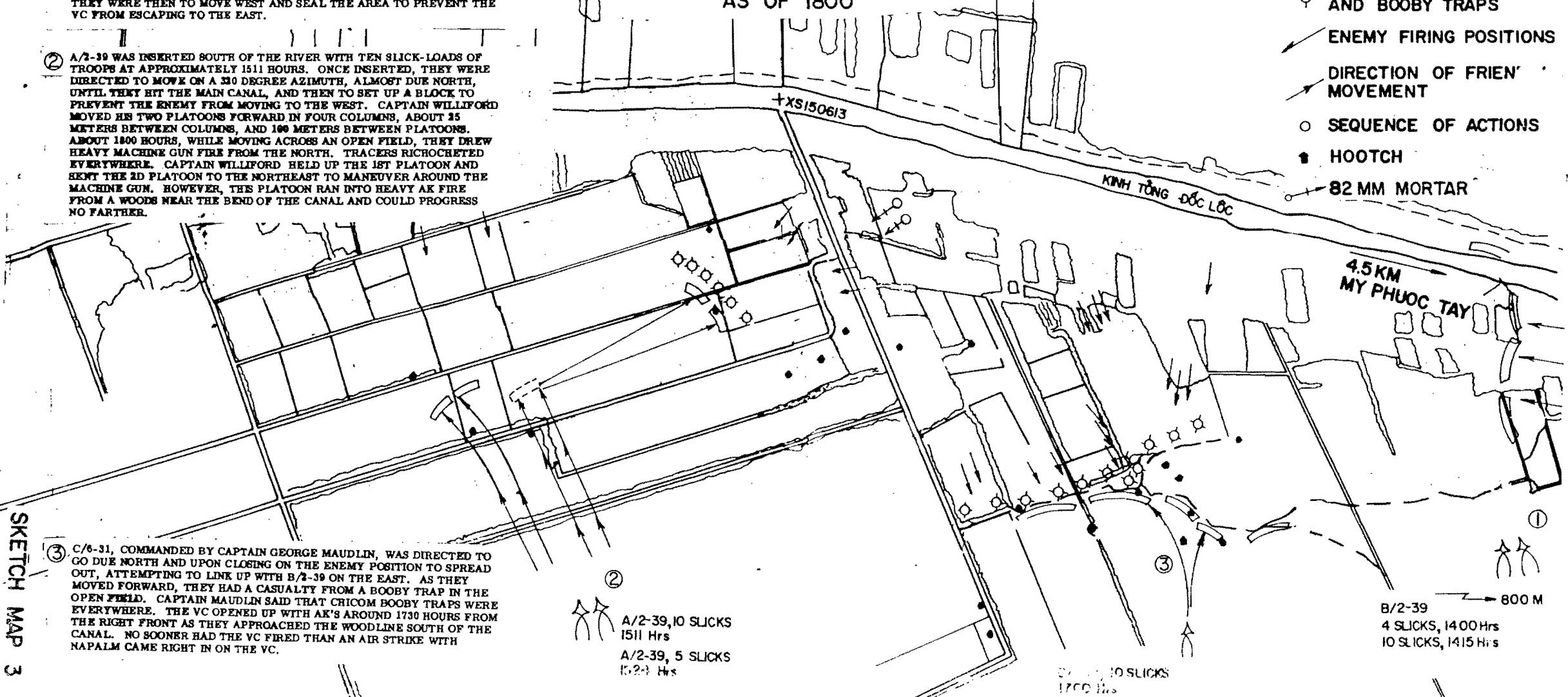
① HE IMMEDIATELY LOADED BRAVO COMPANY, WHICH WAS AT THE FSB, IN THE SLICKS OF THE 191ST ABC AND INSERTED THEM AT 1415 HOURS ABOUT A KILOMETER TO THE EAST OF THE POINT OF CONTACT. HE GAVE THEM INSTRUCTIONS TO MOVE DUE NORTH TO THE TONG DOC LOC CANAL. RATHER THAN MOVE OUT IN THE DIRECTION OF THE AIR STRIKES, BRAVO COMPANY WAS TOLD TO MOVE DUE EAST UNTIL THEY HIT A NORTH-SOUTH STREAMLINE, THEN TO MOVE NORTH UNTIL THEY HIT THE MAIN CANAL. THEY WERE THEN TO MOVE WEST AND SEAL THE AREA TO PREVENT THE VC FROM ESCAPING TO THE EAST.

② A/2-39 WAS INSERTED SOUTH OF THE RIVER WITH TEN SLICK-LOADS OF TROOPS AT APPROXIMATELY 1511 HOURS. ONCE INSERTED, THEY WERE DIRECTED TO MOVE ON A 310 DEGREE AZIMUTH, ALMOST DUE NORTH, UNTIL THEY HIT THE MAIN CANAL, AND THEN TO SET UP A BLOCK TO PREVENT THE ENEMY FROM MOVING TO THE WEST. CAPTAIN WILLIFORD MOVED HIS TWO PLATOONS FORWARD IN FOUR COLUMNS, ABOUT 25 METERS BETWEEN COLUMNS, AND 100 METERS BETWEEN PLATOONS. ABOUT 1600 HOURS, WHILE MOVING ACROSS AN OPEN FIELD, THEY DREW HEAVY MACHINE GUN FIRE FROM THE NORTH. TRACERS RICOCHETED EVERYWHERE. CAPTAIN WILLIFORD HELD UP THE 1ST PLATOON AND SENT THE 2D PLATOON TO THE NORTHEAST TO MANEUVER AROUND THE MACHINE GUN. HOWEVER, THIS PLATOON RAN INTO HEAVY AK FIRE FROM A WOODS NEAR THE BEND OF THE CANAL AND COULD PROGRESS NO FARTHER.

③ C/6-31, COMMANDED BY CAPTAIN GEORGE MAUDLIN, WAS DIRECTED TO GO DUE NORTH AND UPON CLOSING ON THE ENEMY POSITION TO SPREAD OUT, ATTEMPTING TO LINK UP WITH B/2-39 ON THE EAST. AS THEY MOVED FORWARD, THEY HAD A CASUALTY FROM A BOOBY TRAP IN THE OPEN FIELD. CAPTAIN MAUDLIN SAID THAT CHICOM BOOBY TRAPS WERE EVERYWHERE. THE VC OPENED UP WITH AK'S AROUND 1730 HOURS FROM THE RIGHT FRONT AS THEY APPROACHED THE WOODLINE SOUTH OF THE CANAL. NO SOONER HAD THE VC FIRED THAN AN AIR STRIKE WITH NAPALM CAME RIGHT IN ON THE VC.

SKETCH MAP

3

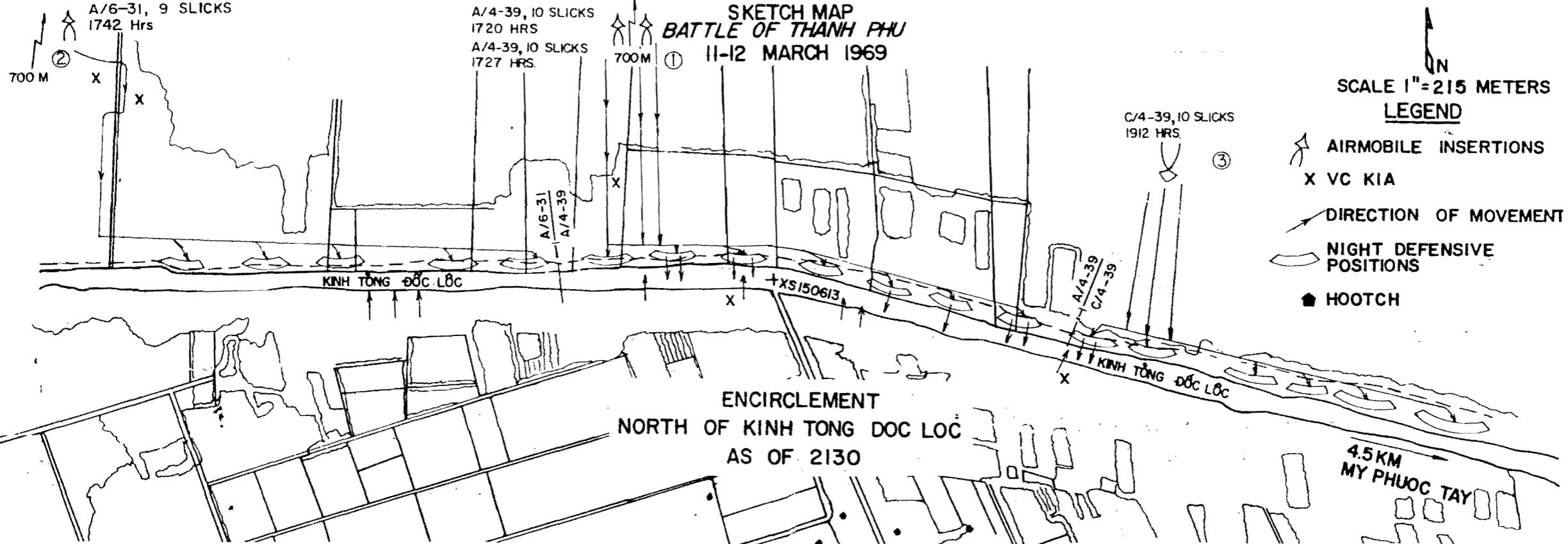


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**SKETCH MAP
BATTLE OF THANH PHU**

11-12 MARCH 1969



② PAST EXPERIENCE HAS SHOWN THAT WHEN FACED WITH A SITUATION LIKE THIS THE VC UNHESITATINGLY TAKE TO THE WATER AND TRY TO ESCAPE AWAY FROM THE US TROOPS. THEREFORE, I DECIDED TO INSERT AND SEAL THE NORTHERN SIDE OF THE TONG DOC LUC CANAL. THE FIRST UNIT TO BE INSERTED NORTH OF THE CANAL WAS A/4-39 AT 1720 HOURS. THEY WERE INSERTED WITHOUT MISHAP IN THE CENTRAL PORTION OF THE BATTLE AREA OPPOSITE THE MACHINE GUN LOCATIONS TO THE SOUTH. THE UNIT MOVED OUT SHARPLY TO THE SOUTH ENCOUNTERING NO BOOBY TRAPS. AT 1920 HOURS SEVERAL HUNDRED METERS NORTH OF THE MAIN CANAL THEY ENGAGED AND KILLED 5 VC AND CAPTURED 2 AK's AS THEY MOVED TO SEAL THE CANAL.

① NEXT TO BE INSERTED ON THE NORTH WAS A/6-31 WHO AIR ASSAULTED ABOUT A "CLICK" TO THE WEST OF A/4-39 AT 1742 HOURS. ON THEIR WAY EAST THEY SAW TWO MEN MOVING PARALLEL TO THEIR MOVEMENT. THEY DIDN'T GET THEM AND A LIGHT FIRE TEAM WAS CALLED IN. THE LIGHT FIRE TEAM ZAPPED THEM GOOD. THEY BEGAN TO MOVE SOUTH UNTIL THEY HIT THE BIG CANAL WHERE THEY PROCEEDED TO LINK UP WITH THE 41st BATTALION, 39th INFANTRY TO THE EAST. THEY WERE ANXIOUS TO GET SET UP, AND ONCE THEY DID EVERYONE FIRED ACROSS THE RIVER. WHEN THEY OPENED UP, THE VC TO THE SOUTH REALLY HIT BACK.

③ C/4-39 WAS INSERTED JUST AT DARK TO THE EAST OF A/4-39. CAPTAIN GORDON D. DE ROOS, THE COMPANY COMMANDER, MOVED HIS 80-MAN COMPANY IN THREE COLUMNS ABOUT 75 METERS APART. EVERYTHING WAS UNEVENTFUL UNTIL THEY HIT THE RIVER AND MOVED TO THE WEST TO ATTEMPT TO LINK UP WITH "ALERT" (A/4-39). FINALLY, WITH THE USE OF M-79 ILLUMINATION AND STROBE LIGHTS, A POSITIVE LINKAGE WAS MADE. ABOUT 2300 HOURS THE 2D PLATOON OF CHARLIE COMPANY SAW ENEMY GROUPS MOVING OUT TO THE WEST. THE FIRST GROUP OF SIX VC WAS ENGAGED AND AT LEAST HALF OF THEM STRUCK DOWN. THE VC WERE RUNNING CLOSE TO THE RIVER, AND THEY WERE OBSERVED MOVING TO THE WEST IN SMALL GROUPS UNTIL ABOUT 0200 WHEN THE FLARE SHIP WENT OFF STATION.

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By T.S. NARA Date 6/8/99

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SKETCH MAP
BATTLE OF THANH PHU
11-12 MARCH 1969ENCIRCLEMENT SOUTH OF
THE TONG DOC LOC CANAL
AS OF 2130SCALE 1"=215 METERS
LEGEND

ARMOBILE INSERTIONS

ANTI PERSONNEL MINES
AND BOOBY TRAPS

ENEMY FIRING POSITIONS

DIRECTION OF FRIENDLY
MOVEMENT

SEQUENCE OF ACTIONS

HOOTCH

82 MM MORTAR

4.5 KM
MY PHUOC TAY

① THERE WERE GRASS FIRES EVERYWHERE. A/3-39 MOVED NORTHWARD UNTIL THEY HIT THE POSITION OF C/6-31. THEY THEN WERE PASSED TO THE WEST ALONG C/6-31'S PERIMETER. THEY MOVED WEST TO A STREAMLINE WHICH THEY CROSSED AND STARTED NORTHWEST ACROSS AN OPEN FIELD.

② WHEN THEY HAD GONE SEVERAL HUNDRED METERS, THE POINT MAN SAW SOMETHING MOVING IN THE TREELINE TO THEIR NORTH. TWO VC WERE OBSERVED TO BE RUNNING. THE TROOPS OPENED UP ON THEM, KILLING THEM. AT THIS TIME THE WHOLE COMPANY DROPPED TO THE GROUND AND THE VC OPENED FIRE SIMULTANEOUSLY. LIEUTENANT COLLINS SAYS THE FIRE WAS FANTASTIC, THE BEST VC FIRE THAT HE HAD ENCOUNTERED. THE VC WERE VERY DISCIPLINED. IT WAS ALL GRAZING FIRE AND EXTREMELY INTENSE. THREE MEN WERE HIT IN THE LEGS BEFORE THEY COULD HIT GROUND. THERE WAS NO COVER, NO DIKES. THEY WERE OUT IN THE OPEN.

③ FOR THE MOMENT A/3-39 RETURNED THE FIRE AS BEST THEY COULD. HOWEVER, THEY IMMEDIATELY GOT CALLS FROM 2D PLATOON TO THE NORTH, STATING THAT THEY WERE BEING FIRED INTO. IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT THE VC WERE BETWEEN THE RIGHT FLANK OF THE 2D PLATOON, A/2-39, and A/3-39.

④ ABOUT 2100 HOURS C/2-39 WAS RE-INSERTED BACK INTO THE SAME AREA FROM WHICH THEY HAD BEEN EXTRACTED EARLIER IN THE AFTERNOON. THEY MOVED TO TAKE THEIR POSITION IN THE SEAL BETWEEN C/6-31 AND B/2-39.

SKETCH MAP 5

A/3-39, 10 SLICKS
2031 Hrs
C/2-39, 6 SLICKS
2100 Hrs

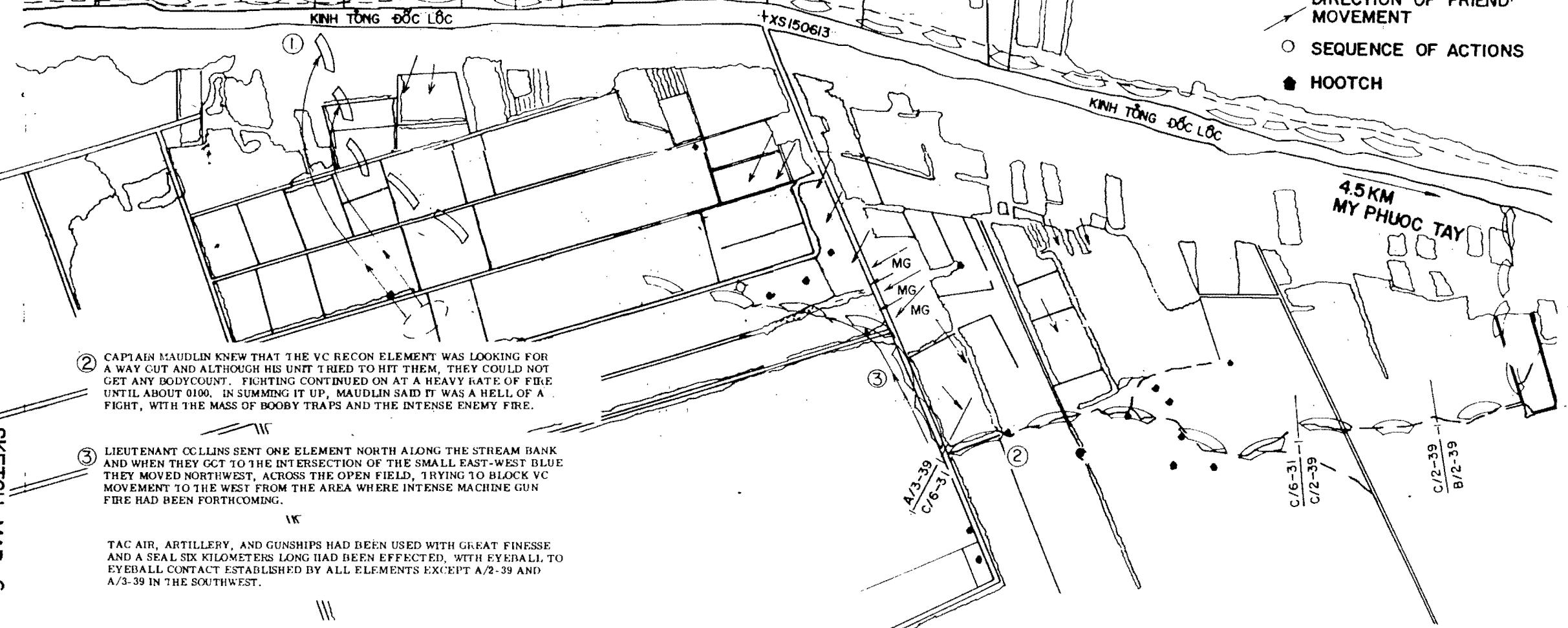
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SKETCH MAP
BATTLE OF THANH PHU
11-12 MARCH 1969ENCIRCLEMENT SOUTH
OF THE TONG DOC LOC
AS OF 0130, 12 MARSCALE 1"=215 METERS
LEGEND

- ↗ AIRMOBILE INSERTIONS
- ANTI PERSONNEL MINES AND BOOBY TRAPS
- ENEMY FIRING POSITIONS
- DIRECTION OF FRIENDLY MOVEMENT
- SEQUENCE OF ACTIONS
- ◆ HOOTCH

① CAPTAIN WILLIFORD'S MEN SPOTTED NINE VC, THREE OF WHICH WERE CARRYING A WOUNDED MAN. IMMEDIATELY THE VC WERE ENGAGED WITH SMALL ARMS AND M-79'S. THEY THINK THEY GOT THEM ALL. A/2-39 AGAIN DREW LIGHT AK FIRE FROM THE NORTHWEST TOLL LINE. NEVERTHELESS, THEY PUSHED ON AND AT ABOUT 0120 HOURS REACHED THE MAJOR CANAL. A POSITIVE LINK-UP WAS MADE WITH A/c-31 TO THE NORTH OF THE RIVER AND EXCEPT FOR A SMALL PORTION SOUTH OF THE CANAL THE SIX KILOMETER SEAL WAS COMPLETE.



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THE BATTLE OF THANH PHU

LESSONS LEARNED

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THE BATTLE OF THANH PHU

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Reaction Time. Once contact is established, it is absolutely essential to make an early decision to pile on and encircle the enemy. In the case of the Battle of Thanh Phu, the decision was made at 1330 hours. The Commanding General made all of the aviation assets of the division available. Personnel were inserted as rapidly as possible, utilizing Chinooks for the non-tactical lift and "slicks" for tactical insertions, yet three insertions were made after dark. Our experience has shown that when the decision to pile on is made after 1500 hours, generally at least 50 percent of the insertions are made during darkness when the enemy is slipperiest.
2. Airborne Personnel Detectors. Although it was known that an enemy unit was in the general area of the contact, insertions on agent reports and visual reconnaissance by the air cav failed to produce any contacts. It was only when the unit inserted on a significant "People Sniffer" reading that contact was established. The "People Sniffer" has proven to be the most reliable intelligence asset of the 9th Infantry Division. Its use has enabled the division to make many contacts with the enemy.
3. Maintenance of Proper Tactical Formations at All Times. Probably, the single major fault of small unit commanders in the field is that they do not maintain proper tactical formations at all times. In the case of the Battle of Thanh Phu, the failure to have flank security out enabled the enemy to obtain surprise and flanking fires. The fact that the troops did not use a point man properly and were bunched up while walking in column formation enabled several booby traps to create multiple casualties. Maintenance of proper tactical formations is of such great importance, particularly in areas where booby traps are found, that repetitive training in this subject is a must.
4. Point of Airborne Insertions. In the Delta terrain with the inundated areas and dense foliage, it is essential that air assaults be inserted as close to the target as is prudent so that troops can close with the enemy in an expeditious manner. Consider the situation where A/2-39 was inserted over one kilometer away from the main canal which they were directed to cut in order to prevent the escape of the enemy to the west. The fact that the unit was inserted so far away enabled the enemy to withdraw part of his forces west along the canal prior to A/2-39 completing its seal. In this case no hot LZ's had been encountered and it appears that with proper LZ preparation that the insertion should have been made much closer to the target area. Combat doctrine of the 9th Infantry Division calls for insertion between 300 and 500 meters from the target area.
5. Grass Fires. This was the first case in which major grass fires had actually enveloped a whole area of contact, thereby creating physical problems for troops on the ground and blanketing the area with smoke. The normal heavy reliance of units on smoke grenades for identification was negated by the smoke. It is recommended when operating in a dry area susceptible to grass fires that units carry pyrotechnic pistols to identify themselves and to direct gunships and aviation fire support on to enemy targets.

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6. Bunker Busting. It has been the experience of the 9th Infantry Division that well-entrenched enemy in bunkers generally can be knocked out only by tac air strikes. We have found that the most productive means of eliminating bunkers is by use of fuse delay bombs. These have proven highly successful and can be placed closer to friendly troops than point detonating ordnance. Gunship rockets and napalm have repeatedly proven non-effective against bunkers. Several units in the past have utilized satchel charges placed on top of bunkers by the air cav to eliminate difficult strong points. Although this method has proven successful, it places the air cav in an extremely vulnerable position and it is recommended only when friendly troops have been pinned down too close to a bunker to extract and bring in air strikes.

7. Gunship Support at Night. At the Battle of Thanh Phu, gunship support during the evening proved to be one of the most important means of interdicting enemy movement. In a nighttime situation identification is absolutely essential and a firm knowledge of the position of friendly elements is required. In the Delta the most easily identifiable terrain feature is normally waterways and it is recommended that gunships use these terrain features in adjusting supporting fires. The gunships were particularly useful in eliminating enemy machine gun elements. Machine guns gave their positions away by the telltale white tracers, enabling gunships to bring devastating fire to bear.

8. Unit Identification at Night. Experience of the 9th Division has been that units in a seal operation are fairly easily identifiable to personnel in the air by use of a strobe light (light, marker, distress). The division has issued 1500 strobe lights for use by troops in the field. Without them positive linkage of units in a seal operation would be virtually impossible. It is particularly important that all friendly troops be identified when artillery strikes are to be brought inside the doughnut (seal). The artillery commander, flying in an LOH, can identify friendly units on the ground at night only if strobe lights are available.

9. Booby Traps. Enemy PW's have repeatedly indicated that they are using booby traps as tactical weapons. Contrary to previous beliefs, the enemy is quite often very near to booby trapped areas. PW's have indicated that many Free World Forces units are discouraged when striking booby traps so that when the enemy holds its fire they withdraw rather than accept the apparently inevitable casualties. Therefore, troops should be alerted that although 94 percent of booby traps are not covered by fire, this is no indication that the enemy is not near. On the contrary they should increase their alertness for bunkers and enemy positions. The PW indicated that around a defensive position the VC normally employ booby traps in three rows with ten meters between rows. Once you penetrate the enemy's outer protection, you will not find booby traps within the interior positions.

10. Policing the Battlefield. Recent experience has indicated a reluctance on the part of troops to sweep the battlefield where large numbers of enemy weapons have been encountered. As mentioned, it is a tough trade-off, possible weapons and bodycount against possible booby trap casualties. When the enemy is known definitely to have been killed, it appears vitally important to accept possible casualties to sweep the area for weapons so that the weapons cannot be used again to kill and cripple US personnel. Sweep operations need not be hurried and when conducted carefully, booby trap casualties will not occur.

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11. Sunken Sampans. VC move their logistical support and their heavy weapons by sampan. When they have arrived at a new base area they offload the sampans, set up their weapons, and then they camouflage the sampans by sinking them. Quite often variations in the tide will show up sunken sampans. Sunken sampans can be an indication that a major VC element is in the area. They are a very useful intelligence indicator.

12. Mortar Fire. The VC have been taught to fire mortars on air assault insertions. It is essential, therefore, that troops exit from the aircraft quickly and disperse rapidly so that neither aircraft nor troops make a good target.

13. VC Communications. As indicated, the VC have a central commo center which is normally the battalion headquarters. The battalion headquarters area has a switchboard, radio receivers and transmitters, as well as the message center. During a battle the VC rely solely upon runners and field phones. They do not use FM radio for fear of giving their position away. The VC organize their position on the basis of interior lines, and the elimination of a headquarters element would just about eliminate all possibilities of command and control.

14. Enemy Use of Reconnaissance Element. Enemy battalions have a very small highly trained recon element. In the case of the 261 B Battalion, it was a 12-man unit. These units continuously probe our units to find weak spots which the rest of the VC battalion can exploit. The movement and probing of the recon element is continuous and starts at the advent of a contact and goes on both day and night.

15. Withdrawal. When ordered to withdraw, the VC send out their recon element first. When the recon element has found a route, the heavy weapons company, battalion headquarters, then the individual elements withdraw, in that order. Consequently, the cessation of mortar and machine gun fire is an excellent indication that the enemy is withdrawing. Commanders should do everything in their power to attempt to determine the route of withdrawal and block up the gap. All VC have been given night training, the most important aspect of which is how to crawl and move at night without being detected. On withdrawals they mostly move in crouching position. With aerial illumination and observation, as used in the Battle of Thanh Phu, the movements can be detected and effective fire brought to bear.

16. The VC Action During Bombing and Artillery Strikes. The VC note the impact area of bombs and artillery and immediately after impact they move into the craters. The PW stated, "Then right after the strikes we would move back into the same area because the US does not bomb into the same area right away." The 9th Division passed this information on to our commanders and within five days one of the brigades picked up seven bodycount by clobbering the VC engaged in just that tactic. There are two methods of combating this VC tactic. One is by having gunships make a pass after every tac air strike or artillery volley. The other is by having the tac air and artillery strike the same area twice in a row without any shift.

17. Advance Warning of US Operations. Interrogation of the VC indicated that his battalion often received advanced warning of planned US troop operations. The warning message was received by the battalion commander via coded radio transmission. He stated his battalion normally received

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warning of a planned US operation for the next day the evening before. The 9th Division has found the aforementioned to be the case on several occasions. Although it is disconcerting, it shows the requirement for strict security concerning forthcoming operations. It is believed that AO clearance procedures lead to the leaks. Clearance procedures should be reviewed to preclude such leaks either by the establishment of permanent AO's or by the ability to obtain AO's quickly just prior to an operation.

18. Helicopter Over-flights. The PW further stated that whenever US choppers over-flew an area, the VC realized that an insertion was imminent and quite often they would move out of the area completely. He called the LOH a "staff officer's" helicopter. The VC have standing orders not to fire on US helicopters, particularly LOH's, because this gives away their position and invites attack.

19. Weapons Evacuation. All VC personnel are ordered to make every effort to recover the weapons of fallen VC. In many cases when the tactical situation requires rapid withdrawal, individual and crew-served weapons are hidden for pick up five or six days later. In the Battle of Thanh Phu, the VC carried out two or three weapons each from the contact area.

20. Evacuation of Wounded. VC wounded are carried to a battalion aid station for emergency treatment by members of the battalion. The battalion aid station is normally centrally located near a route of withdrawal. From that point the wounded are transported by recruited civilians to a hospital supporting the unit. Nylon hammocks are often used to transport the wounded. Evacuation of wounded is often conducted during the heat of the battle.

21. Disposal of Dead. During contact, if the VC are unable to remove their dead or to bury them then the dead are wrapped in nylon camouflage material and left out in the open or hidden in bunkers. The unit normally returns to an area of contact later to bury their dead or to recruit civilian labor to recover and to bury the dead. The PW stated, "We placed some more of the dead in the bunkers and covered some with nylon stuff because US troops fail to check all possible places for bodies." We believe that it is highly useful to utilize stay-behind patrols with snipers to stake out the area of a sizable contact. During the past month this has produced additional bodycount on several occasions.

22. Defense Against CS Gas. The PW stated, "The helicopters were dropping the 'crying gas' and a marsh grass fire was set off by smoke grenades. To defend against the gas, we placed a wet cloth across the bunker openings, then lit a candle or burner to cause any gas which might penetrate the bunker to rise to the ceiling while we remained on the floor. This was 100% effective. The other method we use is to urinate on a towel and place it over the face. After the attack we use a 'Chinese Oil' to clear the 'crying gas' from our skin." The 9th Division ran a test on the VC methods and determined that they indeed were effective as stated. However, we found out that during a temperature inversion when the gas persistently stayed on the ground that it would penetrate into the foxholes. We also found out that if we used double doses of gas instead of the normal single cannister drop that the CS would then penetrate the foxholes. A useful technique for friendly troops arises from the foregoing VC tactic:

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since the VC stay covered up for five to fifteen minutes (the time depending on the persistency of the gas) after a CS attack, then after a CS drop is a good time for friendly soldiers to maneuver against VC positions.

23. The Use of Local Guerrillas. Local guerrillas are used to lay booby traps to protect the flanks of the battalion. These booby traps are often laid in two to four rows along the battalion flanks and astride possible avenues of approach into the battalion defensive positions. The local guerrillas also provide a screening and delaying force for the battalion.

24. VC Stream Crossing Technique. When withdrawing from contact, they often use inflated nylon sheets to float clothes, weapons, and equipment across a stream or canal. Where possible, the larger weapons are broken down and floated across. Sampan use is avoided due to ease of detection by US helicopters.

25. US Helicopter Assaults. Helicopter assaults were very fast and well done, allowing VC no time to move out. Immediately after the first two helicopters popped smoke, US troops came in.

26. US Tactics - VC View. US troops stay too close together during movement, rest, or withdrawal. US troops move in one group allowing the VC to easily pin the element down with one machine gun. The US wait until they are too close to VC position to deploy for assault. US troops believe that because they cannot immediately see the VC in the area, the VC are not there. US troops fail to check all canals and bunkers. US troops go slowly in booby trapped areas, but fight very courageously. US troops moving in single file close together cause many booby trap casualties.

27. US Artillery. VC do not greatly fear US artillery if they are in bunkers. The VC infantry are well protected from air/artillery strikes if they stay in their bunkers.

28. VC After-Action Reports. As a result of this battle the US had three killed and 20 wounded and one helicopter was shot down. In the words of the PW, the following VC report was submitted: "On the day of 13 March 1969 my Battalion Commander reported on the radio to the 1st Regiment that: There were 1500 US troops that participated in the battle from Saigon. We were courageous and killed 150 US troops, shot down one jet aircraft and two helicopters. After this the Battalion Commander gave the speech in front of the soldiers that the Regiment highly recommended praise to each soldier. The Battalion Commander told me to make a good report to the Regiment." It has been our experience that the VC always exaggerate the results of a battle. Therefore, it is important to counteract this false reporting, which tends to improve their morale and give the VC a sense of accomplishment, by US and GVN PSYOPS activities that tell the true story of the battle. PSYOPS should be the quick reaction type so that they can be disseminated within 48 hours after the completion of the contact.

29. VC Re-Supply. The PW stated that within a few days after the battle his unit had been re-supplied 60mm mortars and "We were very tired and our morale was very low, but the battalion commander gave the word that our unit (75 men) would return to Kien Phong to get reinforcements and recruit new men to fight again." It appears that the ability of the VC to re-supply and to immediately commence recruiting gives them a resiliency

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that makes it difficult to eliminate a unit. Once a unit has been in contact and hurt bad, every effort should be made to find him and keep the pressure on to prevent him from bouncing back. It has been our experience that enemy units are rarely, if ever, "wiped out."