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THE BATTLE OF AN THACH 20 August 1967

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
Headquarters, 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry
APO San Francisco 96355

AVDC-C-CTB

30 August 1967

SUBJECT: Combat Operations After Action Report

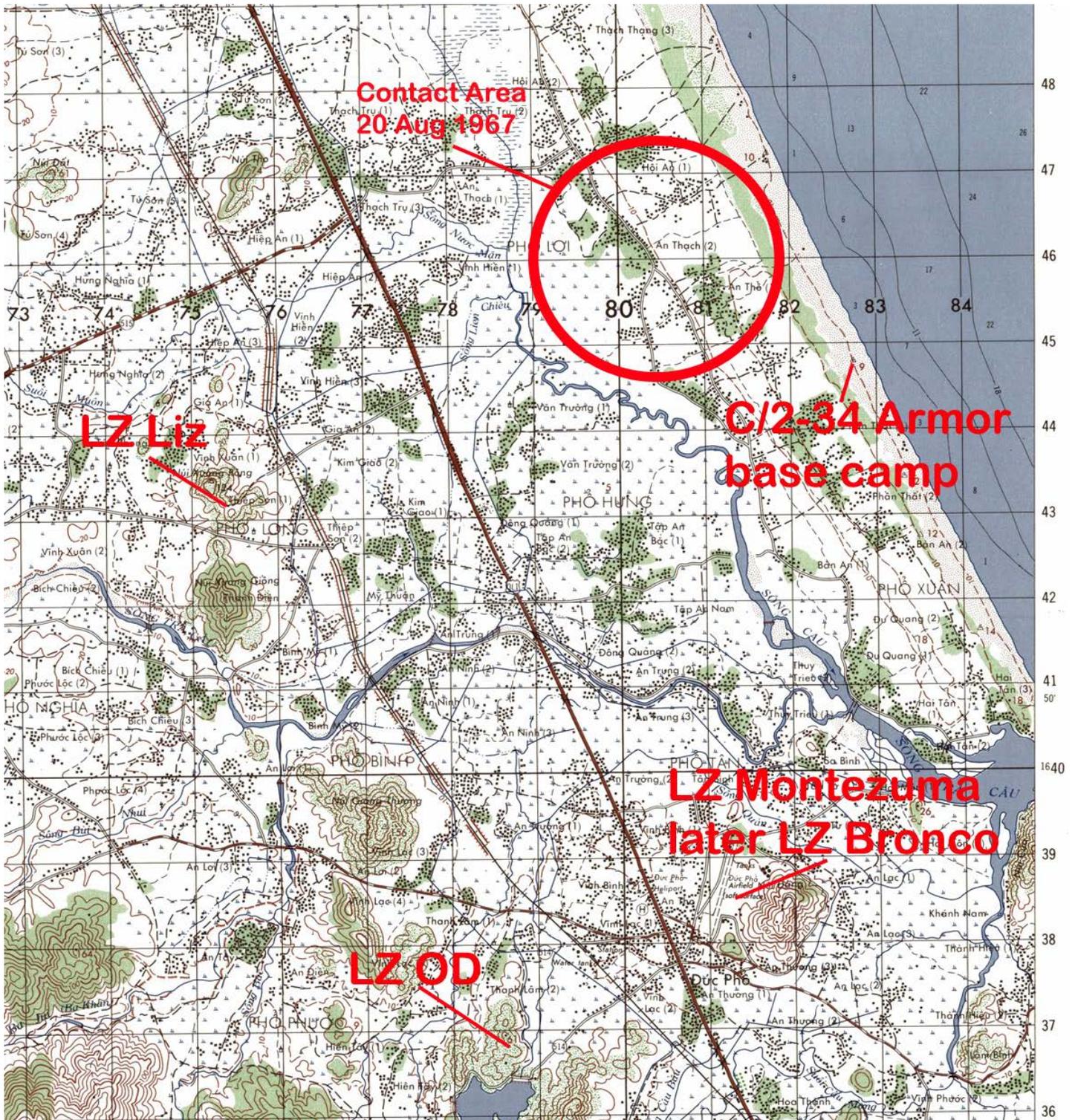
TO: Commanding Officer
3rd Brigade Task Force, 4th Infantry Division
APO San Francisco 96355

1. Name of Operation: Battle of An Thach.
2. Date of Operation: 201100 to 202000 August 67.
3. Location: An Thach Hamlet, Duc Pho District, Quang Ngai Province, RVN.
4. Command and Control Headquarters:
 - a. 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry
 - b. Reporting Officers:
 - (1) LTC Norman L. Tiller, Sr., CO, 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry.
 - (2) CPT Larry W. Hicks, CO, Co A, 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry.
 - (3) CPT James L. Lindsey, CO, CO B, 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry.
 - (4) CPT William E. Hocker, CO, Co C, 2d Bn, 34th Armor.
 - (5) 1LT Homer L. Krout, Platoon Leader, Reconnaissance Platoon, 2d Bn, 35th Infantry.
5. Task Organization:
 - a. Company A, 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry.
 - b. Company B, 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry.
 - c. Team Hocker: Company C, 2d Battalion, 34th Armor and Reconnaissance Platoon, 2d Bn, 35th Infantry.



Cliff Westwood, Cpt. Jim Lindsey, Jim Leatherberry
B Co 2/35th photo by Westwood

6. Supporting Forces:
 - a. The Tactical Air Control Party attached to the brigade provided an airborne forward controller (FAC) on immediate notice. The FAC played a vital role as an aerial observer, by informing the ground commanders of enemy movement and dispositions and by using marking rockets to indicate enemy positions.
 - b. Observation helicopters from 3rd Brigade Aviation Section maintained close surveillance of the immediate contact area and advised ground elements of enemy movement.
 - c. Gunships from the 174th Aviation Company (Airmobile Light) covered possible routes of enemy withdrawal preventing the enemy from escaping.



20 August contact area and Fire Support Base (FSB) locations

7. Intelligence:

a. Weather: On 20 August 1967, from 1130 hours to 1630 hours the temperature varied from 92 degrees to 97 degrees F; visibility was seven to ten miles and the wind was five to ten knots from the south-southwest. Visibility was excellent with scattered cirrus clouds at 15,000 feet.

b. Terrain: The site of the battlefield was characterized by thick bamboo and cacti hedgerows forming irregular rectangles with flat open ground between them. Concealed behind these hedgerows the enemy had excellent fields of fire. The hedgerows afforded the enemy natural obstacles not easily penetrated by a dismounted soldier.



**Thick Hedgerows surrounded hootches
photo by Jim Anderson B/2/35**

c. Enemy: A reinforced rifle company of approximately sixty men was the antagonist in this contact. They fought desperately, from bunkers and trenches, to hold on to their positions without success. The enemy was quickly encircled. Realizing his predicament he attempted to escape to the west, moving from trench to trench pausing only long enough to fire a few bursts and move again. Realizing that he was trapped, his resistance became fanatical and several enemy soldiers made suicidal charges at tanks with automatic weapons. The enemy chose to die rather than surrender. Others attempted to evade by taking refuge in

family bunkers. They were discovered by friendly elements making a final search of the battlefield. They, too, refused to surrender and continued to resist until they were killed. The 2d Company, 87th Bn, 2d VC Regiment, 3rd NVA Division was identified from captured documents. A captured personnel roster listed forty-one men present for duty, fourteen men were on other missions, sick leave, or R&R. This unit was equipped with twenty-seven weapons as indicated by a captured weapons roster. Eighteen of those weapons were captured, listed below in paragraph 11 b.



C/2-34th Armor Tank with clearing blade photo by Jack Reed C/3-4th Cav

d. Analysis: The 2d Company, 97th Bn, 2d VC Regiment assembled its forces in the village of An Thach presumably to accomplish one of two missions. One mission could have been to conduct an attack on a nearby P.F. outpost. Another possibility could have been to evacuate the unit by boat to Binh Dinh Province. The amount of ammunition collected from the bodies was sufficient for the enemy to mount and sustain a limited attack; however, their sixty man company was an

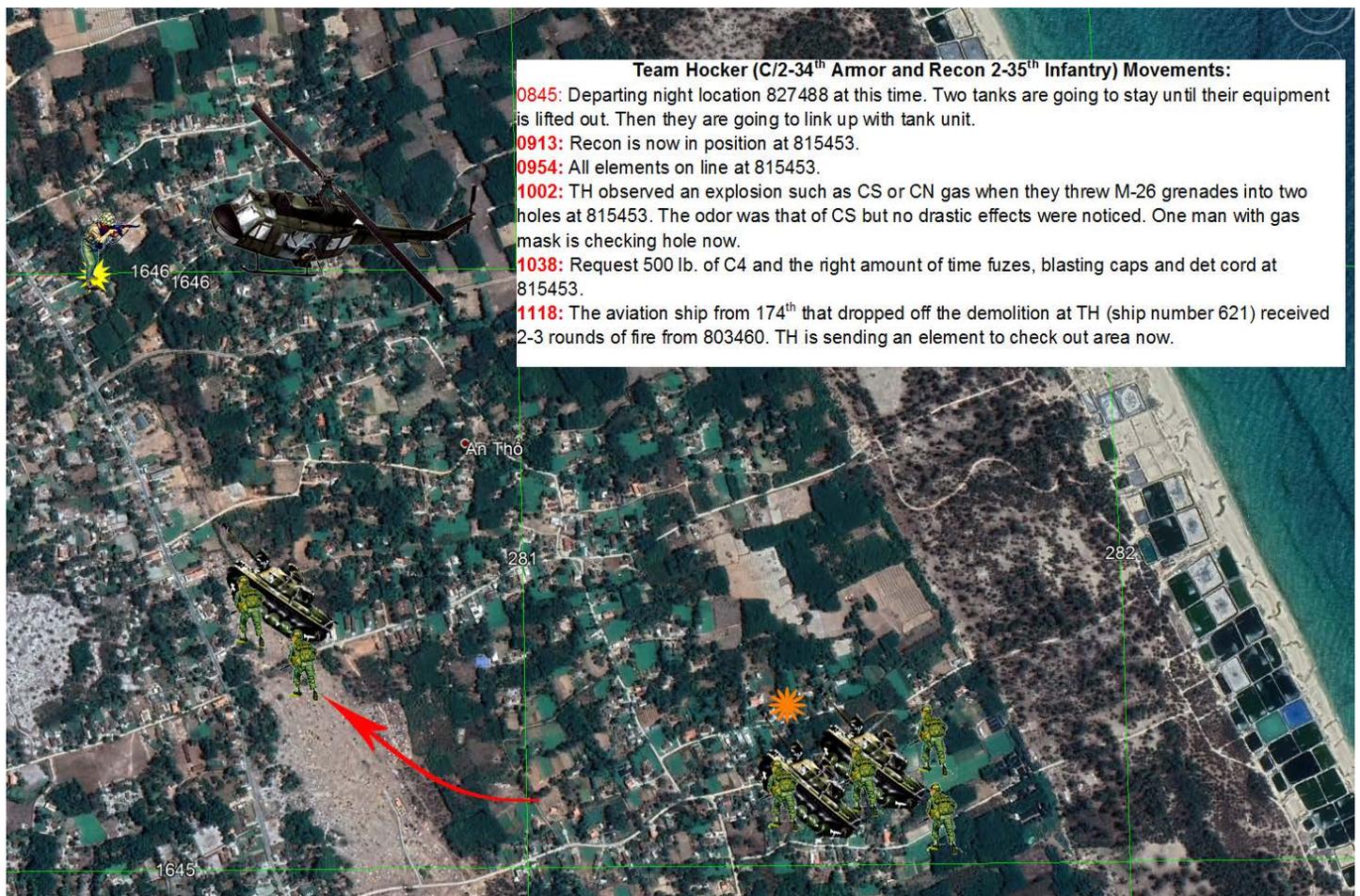
inadequate force to engage a U.S. company or base camp. Nevertheless, a unit of this size could easily overrun a P.F. outpost. It can be safely assumed that the enemy intended to stay only long enough to assemble forces and formulate final plans. Intelligence reports from 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) indicate that the 97th Bn is presently operating in Binh Dinh Province; therefore it is logical to assume that this company from the 97th Bn would have moved south to join its parent unit had it not been annihilated in the battle of An Thach.

8. Mission: The mission of Team Hocker (C/2-34 Armor(-) and Recon Plat 2-35) was to conduct a detailed search of the hamlet of An Tho, vicinity BS812454. Once contact with the enemy was made, by a heavy tank section investigating a "ground to air" fire report at BS800469, Captain Hocker altered the mission to close with the enemy. The missions of Company B and Company A were to block from the north and south respectively and to assist Team Hocker in the "mopping up" phase of the battle.

9. Concept of Operation: Evolving from the enemy's maneuvers and from the general nature of the terrain, the concept was that Team Hocker would push the enemy from the hamlet of An Thach (2), vicinity BS800464, to the west toward the open rice fields. Company B, operating 1500 meters north of An Thach, was to maneuver to the south, blocking enemy escape to the north; while Company A was air assaulted at BS805458, south of An Thach, to engage the enemy fleeing in that direction. Observation aircraft were to keep watch over the open areas to the west.

10. Execution:

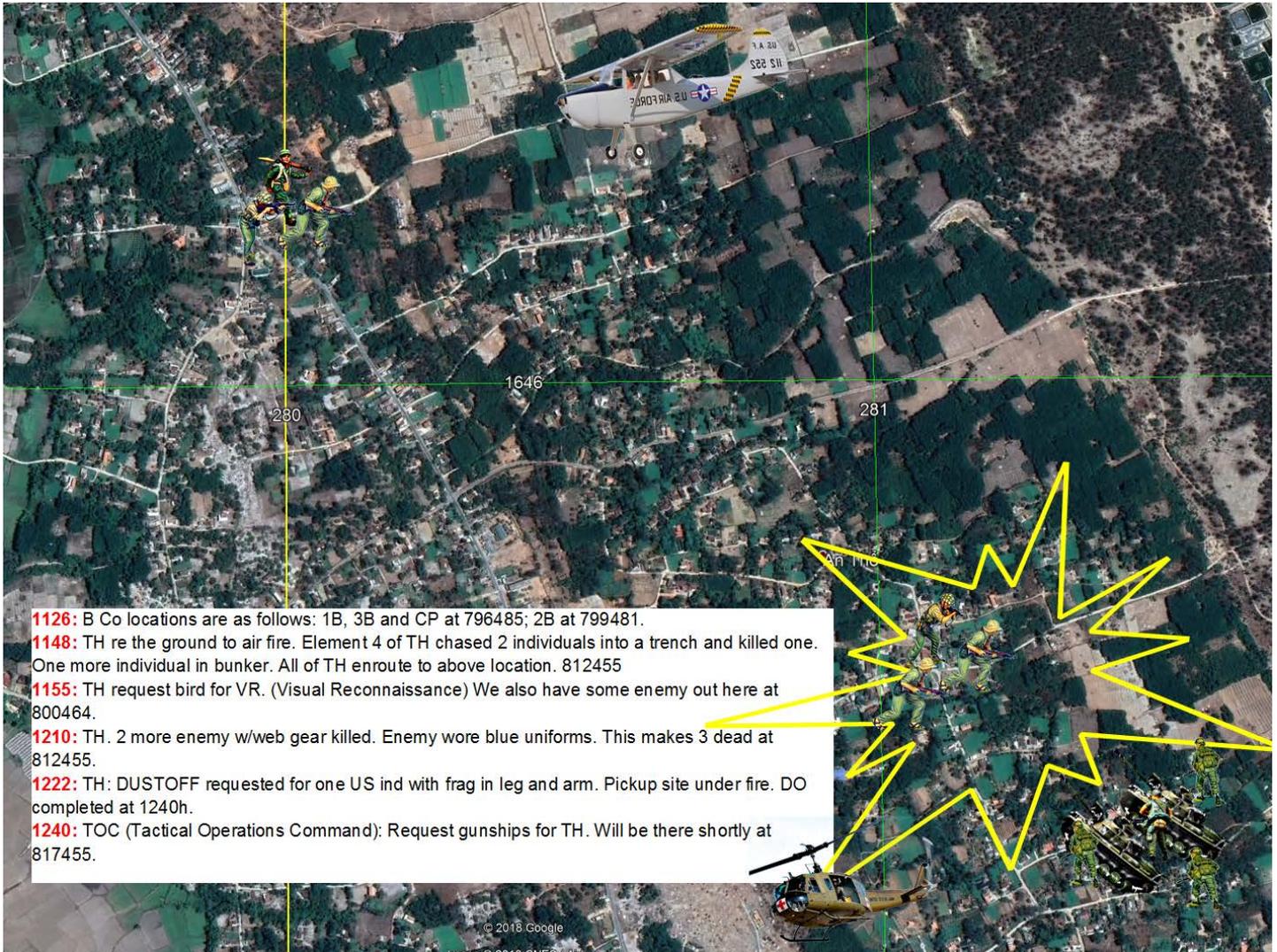
a. At 1118 hours the battalion net control station received a report from the 174th Aviation Company that a helicopter delivering resupply to Team Hocker had received small arms fire from vicinity BS803460, about 500 meters northwest of Team Hocker's location. Captain Hocker sent a section of three tanks to the north and at 1148 this section reported chasing two VC into a trench and killing one at BS812455. (Sketch 1) Almost immediately the tank section became heavily engaged from several enemy positions firing automatic and semi-automatic fire.



Team Hocker Preliminary Movement

Captain Hocker deployed the remainder of his team to the northwest and requested an observation aircraft. The brigade FAC, Maj. Murray L. Smith already airborne over the AO, was above the area of contact within five minutes. He was able to observe the main enemy force and advised Captain Hocker accordingly.

By 1210 hours all of Team Hocker had deployed on line moving to the northwest and had killed two additional VC. At 1222 hours two men from C/2-34 Armor (-) were wounded when their tank was hit by an explosive round of unknown type. The tank was not disabled and while they awaited aeromedical evacuation the team continued to pursue and to engage the enemy.



1126: B Co locations are as follows: 1B, 3B and CP at 796485; 2B at 799481.
1148: TH re the ground to air fire. Element 4 of TH chased 2 individuals into a trench and killed one. One more individual in bunker. All of TH enroute to above location. 812455
1155: TH request bird for VR. (Visual Reconnaissance) We also have some enemy out here at 800464.
1210: TH. 2 more enemy w/web gear killed. Enemy wore blue uniforms. This makes 3 dead at 812455.
1222: TH: DUSTOFF requested for one US ind with frag in leg and arm. Pickup site under fire. DO completed at 1240h.
1240: TOC (Tactical Operations Command): Request gunships for TH. Will be there shortly at 817455.

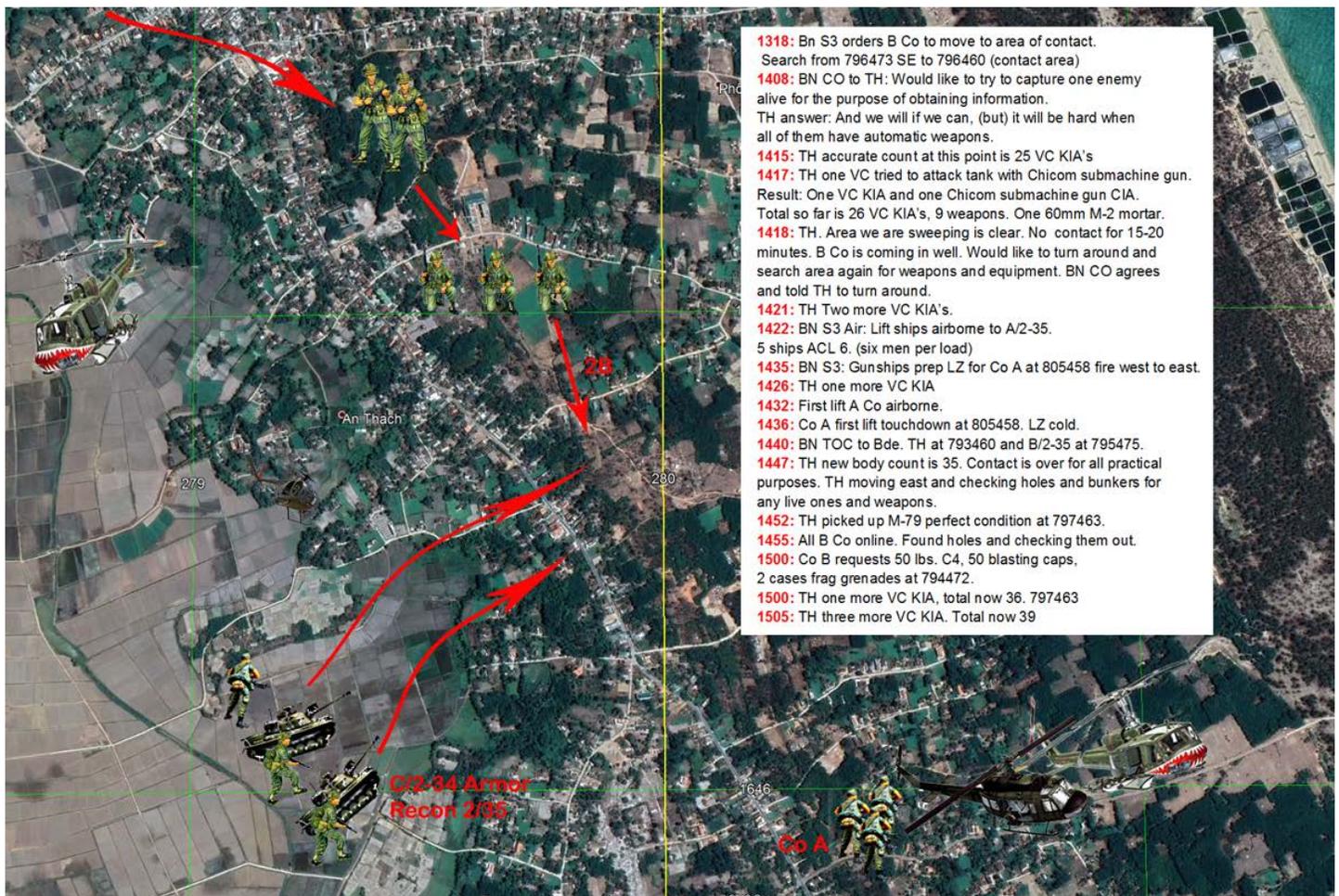
First Contact

At 1240 hours the battalion requested gunships to support the battle; they were on station five minutes later. Captain Hocker estimated the enemy force to be at least a platoon and reported that they were moving to the west. While Major Smith and gunship pilots kept watch over the western edge of the hamlet, the tank infantry team routed and killed eight enemy in trenches vicinity BS796460.

By 1315 hours, eleven enemy had been killed and two friendlies wounded. The enemy was not attempting a rapid withdrawal but was being moved out by the firepower and the close order tactics of the tanks and infantry. Enemy fire was still moderate to heavy and at 1318 hours LTC Tiller, the Battalion Commander, ordered Company B to move from their location to the north of the battle area southwest toward the scene of contact.

b. As B/2-35 moved to the southwest LTC Tiller directed them from the air. When they were within 150 meters of An Thach hamlet B Company deployed on line and began searching to the south. Team Hocker, still in contact, reported another enemy killed at 1358 hours.

At 1400 hours the Battalion Commander alerted A Company to prepare to be picked up from their location and be air assaulted south of An Thach.



Team Hocker swept back through the contact area. Company A killed 5 VC in a bunker just north of their LZ. Company B blocked to the north and sent 2B to link with TH to search.

Between 1400 and 1417 hours, Team Hocker pushed through the last heavy enemy resistance, killing fourteen enemy, many at point blank range.

As soon as Team Hocker reached the western edge of An Thach, Captain Hocker requested permission to reverse his course and move slowly back through the contact area. LTC Tiller granted permission and instructed the team to search the contact area for hidden VC and for weapons and equipment. When Team Hocker began the "mopping up" phase of the battle at 1420 hours a total of 26 enemy had been killed and nine weapons, including a 60mm mortar, had been captured.

c. As B Company swept on line to the southwest and Team Hocker searched on line back through the battlefield to the east, Company A was air assaulted south of An Thach, completing insertion at 1510 hours and began a systematic search to the north.

Team Hocker reported enemy kills at five to ten minute intervals throughout the following hour, bringing the total kills to 39 by 1505 hours.

At 1630 hours the Brigade S2 reported that Brigade Aviation aircraft supporting the battle had killed eight VC and captured three weapons.

At 1800 hours Company A engaged and killed two enemy and captured two automatic weapons. Elements of A/2-35 and B/2-35 made contact with Team Hocker securing the pickup zone vicinity BS800462, while the remainder of Team Hocker continued the search.

Company B moved northeast towards their night location along the beach. The extraction of A/2-35 began at 1843. At 1905 with two platoons of Co A extracted, the remaining platoon located a bunker with armed enemy inside. The last lift was delayed until 2005 hours. In the interim, 1A/2-35 killed five VC and captured their weapons. Following extraction of 1A/2-35 the tank platoon moved to Team Hocker's night location.



Roberto Albanoz photo A/2/35 on beach at Duc Pho

d. Contact with the enemy was moderate between 1100 and 1500 hours. Contact was light from 1500 until 2000 hours. Range of engagement varied from one meter to one hundred meters. Communications were good within the contact area and also between reporting stations.

11. Results:

a. Enemy Personnel losses 53 KIA

b. Enemy weapons seized:

- (1) 60mm Mortar (complete)..... 1
- (2) M-79..... 1
- (3) SKS..... 9
- (4) Soviet Machinegun..... 1
- (5) BAR..... 1
- (6) AK- 47..... 1
- (7) Chicom SMG..... 1
- (8) M-16 1
- (9) M1 Carbine 1
- (10) 45 cal automatic pistol 1

12. Commander's Analysis:

This victory can be attributed directly to the cooperation and teamwork of all the units and individuals involved. It is a lasting example of several well trained units working toward a common goal. When the initial report of enemy ground fire came in it was immediately relayed to the nearest friendly unit which took immediate action. Captain Hocker's quick response coupled with the aggressive tactics and thorough search techniques of his team brought about this enemy defeat. This action points up the absolute necessity of having air observation over the target area.



**Cpt. Hocker, LTC Tiller, Lt Krout, Maj. Ben Crosby
Cpt. Hocker was later killed in action**

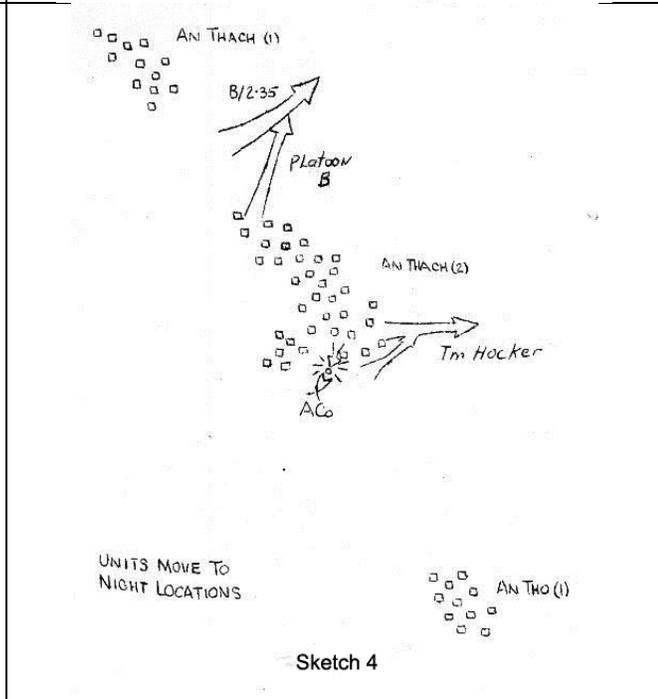
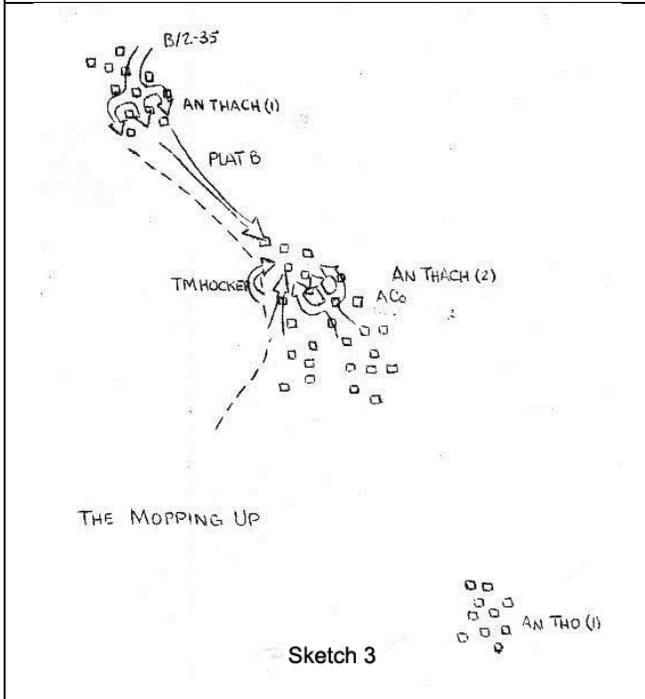
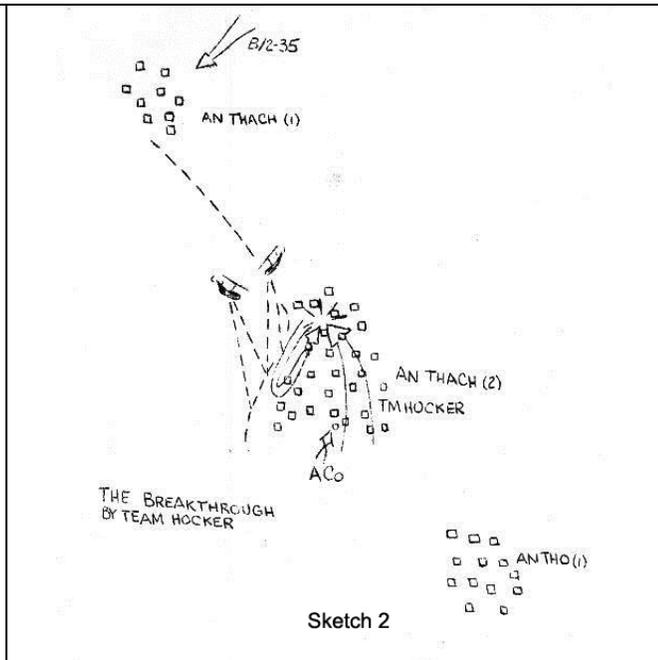
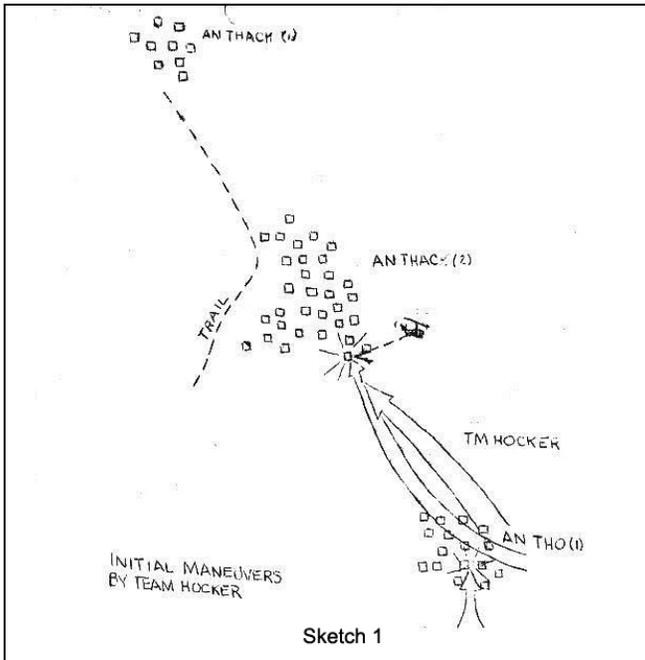
Major Smith, USAF, greatly influenced the course of action by assisting Captain Hocker in the maneuver of his elements directly into the enemy position. Major Smith continuously reported on the enemy maneuvers until the 3rd Bde Aviation Section helicopters were able to arrive on the scene. This type of aerial observation paid off handsomely in the extremely high kill ratio of this contact, fifty-three enemy KIA to zero US KIA. Continuous aerial observation allowed Captain Hocker to maneuver his forces and defeat the enemy unit piecemeal.

Captain Hocker repeatedly concentrated his forces in overwhelming strength at the enemy's location as reported by the aerial observers. This outstanding employment of tanks and infantry together, the firepower and maneuver of the tanks with the close in fighting of the infantry, resulted in the virtual annihilation of the 2d Company, 97th Battalion, 2d VC Regiment.

NORMAN L. TILLER, Sr.
 LTC, Infantry
 Commanding

4 Incls:

- Sketch I – Initial maneuvers by Team Hocker.
- Sketch II – The breakthrough by Team Hocker.
- Sketch III – The "mopping up."
- Sketch IV – Units move to night locations.



Team Hocker (C/2-34th Armor and Recon 2-35th Infantry) Movements:

Taken from S3 Daily Journals

- 0845:** Departing night location 827488 at this time. Two tanks are going to stay until their equipment is lifted out. Then they are going to link up with tank unit.
- 0913:** Recon is now in position at 815453.
- 0954:** All elements on line at 815453.
- 1002:** TH observed an explosion such as CS or CN gas when they threw M-26 grenades into two holes at 815453. The odor was that of CS but no drastic effects were noticed. One man with gas mask is checking hole now.
- 1038:** Request 500 lb. of C4 and the right amount of time fuzes, blasting caps and det cord at 815453.
- 1118:** The aviation ship from 174th that dropped off the demolition at TH (ship number 621) received 2-3 rounds of fire from 803460. TH is sending an element to check out area now.
- 1126:** B Co locations are as follows: 1B, 3B and CP at 796485; 2B at 799481.
- 1148:** TH re the ground to air fire. Element 4 of TH chased 2 individuals into a trench and killed one. One more individual in bunker. All of TH enroute to above location. 812455
- 1155:** TH request bird for VR. (Visual Reconnaissance) We also have some enemy out here at 800464.
- 1210:** TH. 2 more enemy w/web gear killed. Enemy wore blue uniforms. This makes 3 dead at 812455.
- 1222:** TH: DUSTOFF requested for one US ind with frag in leg and arm. Pickup site under fire. DO completed at 1240h.
- 1240:** TOC (Tactical Operations Command): Request gunships for TH. Will be there shortly at 817455.
- 1245:** TH has 174th Avn. Gunships on station at 766464.
- 1251:** TH reports they have about a platoon size contact. They seem to have a recoilless rifle at 799464. (Tank had been hit and one WIA)
- 1253:** TH reports the enemy are moving to the west. BN S3 said get gunships to herd them in. Keep gunships on stand-by at all times at 799464.
- 1259:** TH has 2 more enemy KIA at area of contact.
- 1303:** TH has a couple of VC boxed up in a hole, trying to get them out at this time.
- 1306:** TH five more enemy killed 799464
- 1312:** BN S3 in VR chopper: Sees TH moving to west of red rooftop house at 797463. The VC are moving to the rice paddy. We have one more dead VC. TH: Total of 11 enemy killed at this time. Loc. Is 797463
- 1314:** TH policed up one M-2 60mm mortar.
- 1318:** Bn S3 orders B Co to move to area of contact. Search from 796473 SE to 796460 (contact area)
- 1325:** BN CO. Moving Co B to north edge of An Thach, then they will move to SE. One element of TH moving west. One element of TH moving east to police up those left behind. B Co moving and will be there in 30 minutes.
- 1328:** TH captured two SKS's, negative ammo. 796460
- 1338:** TH we have another weapon. This makes 3. BN S3 in air ready to pick up BN CO.
- 1348:** BN CO to Co B: Pop smoke and I can tell you how far you are from trail junction.--- Your lead elements are about 100 meters from the trail junction 796473. There you will have to move your elements to the west a little to the village and spread out and begin your search south.

1358: TH one more dead enemy w/complete web gear including weapon. 796460

1400: BN CO to Co A: Get ready for insertion onto TH contact location.

1406: BN S3 to Brigade: We just killed 4 more enemy all of which were fully equipped and had automatic weapons.

1408: BN CO to TH: Would like to try to capture one enemy alive for the purpose of obtaining information. TH answer: And we will if we can, (but) it will be hard when all of them have automatic weapons.

1415: BN CO: Going to put A/2-35 into 805458 then move to village that runs north and west. First element, move to east, possibly as a block along trench and rice paddies. (next) Line them up with 1st element east to west and move to village area. Work to northwest searching to area 600 meters northwest where contact area is. They are scattering and we think they are in this area.

1415: BN CO: Advise gunships and tanks that B Co is moving down from the north. They are 300 meters from your northern element. Tanks working south along rice paddy and then east to white sandy area 798464 to search for any that got out that way.

1415: TH accurate count at this point is 25 VC KIA's

1417: TH one VC tried to attack tank with Chicom submachine gun. Result: One VC KIA and one Chicom submachine gun CIA. Total so far is 26 VC KIA's, 9 weapons. One 60mm M-2 mortar.

1418: TH. Area we are sweeping is clear. O contact for 15-20 minutes. B Co is coming in wwell. Would like to turn around and search area again for weapons and equipment. BN CO agrees and told TH to turn around.

1421: TH Two more VC KIA's.

1422: BN S3 Air: Lift ships airborne to A/2-35. 5 ships ACL 6. (six men per load)

1435: BN S3: Gunships prep LZ for Co A at 805458 fire west to east.

1426: TH ne more VC KIA

1432: First lift A Co airborne.

1436: Co A first lift touchdown at 805458. LZ cold.

1440: BN TOC to Bde. TH at 793460 and B/2-35 at 795475.

1447: TH new body count is 35. Contact is over for all practical purposes. TH moving east and checking holes and bunkers for any live ones and weapons.

1448: Advise 3d Bde Avn. Friendly unit locations. C/2-34(-) (TH) 796462. B/2-35 776470, A/2-35 805459

1452: TH picked up M-79 perfect condition at 797463.

1455: All B Co online. Found holes and checking them out.

1500: Co B requests 50 lbs. C4, 50 blasting caps, 2 cases frag grenades at 794472.

1500: TH one more VC KIA, total now 36. 797463

1505: TH three more VC KIA. Total now 39

1505: B Co req. DUSTOFF for one US ind. w/frag wounds to back, not serious. 794472. DO at 1513.

1510: Last element of Co A on ground at 805508.

1513: BN CO and S3 going to land at TH location to pick up documents CIA and take to BN S2 (intelligence)

1537: TH loc. 800463

1539: Co A loc. 803458

1610: B Co online and searching for VC WIA that FAC spotted.

1610: A Co captured 12 M-166 mags w/ammo & 2 BAR mags w/2 loaded, 1 pistol belt and sandals 803458

1616: 2B going to meet TH & will be OPCON to TH to help search.

1617: B/2-35 req DUSTOFF for one US w/schrapnel to neck. DO completed 1636.

1630: Bde Aviation reports they killed 8 enemy on edge of TH contact area 796460. Also capture one M-16 rifle. These are in addition to TH KIA count.

1635: Recon element found tunnel with litter. They are digging it up now. 30' long by 4' wide. At 798464

1644: TH captured one SKS rifle

1717: Co A at 800464 found bunker w 3 packs, 2 VC and 1 NVA entrenching tool. Ponchos and various clothing, rice rolls, msc. Documents, 7.62 ammo and 20 rounds 9mm ammo.

1743: TH: Recon picked up web gear, one RPG-2 rocket, carnine ammo at 798462

1753: 1B at 796464 located documents to be of our installations in detail. 2 women VCS, Documents came from hole.

1800: Co A KIA 2 enemy at 800462. Two weapons CIA. One AK and one BAR. Also one grenade.

1807: Co B at same location got few sniper rounds 76465. S3 will pick up VCS and maps

1835: BN S3: have CO's C/2-34 Armor and Recon at Co A PZ (pickup zone) 800462 and taken to Montezuma.

1840: B Co loc: 1B 797470, 2B 796468; 3B & CP 79570

1842: Co A lifts began at 800462.

1855: B Co at night loc at 817474

1905: Co A total of 3 enemy out of bunker and still pulling them out. 800468 Have to hold off on extraction. Pickup at 1945.

1915: Co A have total of 5 VC KIA

2002: Last lift of Co A diverted to Montezuma due to bad weather at LZ Dragon

2045: C/2-34 Armor at night location at 824457