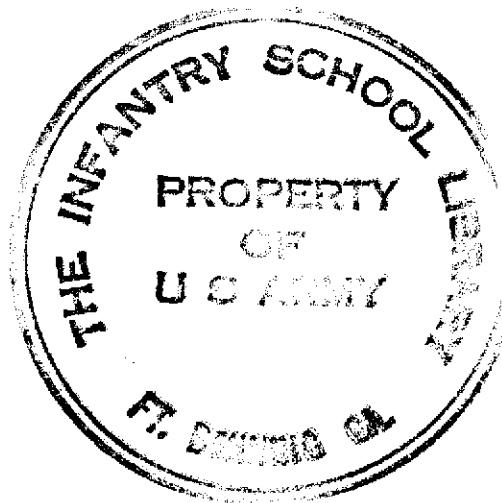


UNITED STATES ARMY INFANTRY SCHOOL

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COMBAT OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST BATTALION, 33D
INFANTRY REGIMENT, 21ST INFANTRY DIVISION (ARVN)
42D DTA, IV TACTICAL CORPS, IN A SEARCH AND
DESTROY MISSION ON 15 - 16 FEBRUARY 1967, IN CHOUNG
THEIN PROVINCE, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM. (PERSONAL
EXPERIENCE OF A BATTALION SENIOR ADVISOR)



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COMBAT OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST BATTALION, 33D INFANTRY REGIMENT, 21ST INFANTRY DIVISION (ARVN) 42D DTA, IV TACTICAL CORPS, IN A SEARCH AND DESTROY MISSION ON 15 - 16 FEBRUARY 1967, IN CHOUNG THEIN PROVINCE, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM. (PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF A BATTALION SENIOR ADVISOR.)

INTRODUCTION

During the first week of February 1967, several Viet Cong defected (HO CHAN) to the 21st Infantry Division (ARVN). The defectors had detailed knowledge and general location of a large Viet Cong supply and munitions cache located within Choung Thein Province.

Brigadier General NGYEN-VAN-MINH, the 21st Infantry Division (ARVN) Commander, concurrently 42d DTA Commander, in keeping with his policy of exploiting Viet Cong returnees to the fullest extent possible, hurriedly initiated planning for a division airmobile search and destroy operation. Primary maneuver units for the operation were the 1st Battalion, 33d Regiment; 2d Battalion, 31st Regiment; 42d Ranger Battalion; and the 44th Ranger Battalion. The plan was submitted to Headquarters, IV Corps, on 13 February 1967 and subsequently approved the same day with only minor reductions in requested tactical air support. With this corps approval, the operation was then officially designated DAN CHI 279 (21st Infantry Division Operation identification system).

THE DIVISION PLAN

General: The operation was to have begun at 0700, 14 February 1967; however, due to bad weather, it was postponed to the following day. Participating units included the 1st Battalion, 33d Regiment; 2d Battalion, 31st Regiment; 42d Ranger Battalion; 44th Ranger Battalion; and the 417th Regional Force (RF) Company. The 42d Ranger Battalion was designated as the primary assault unit to seize the objective area and was to be lifted to two separate landing zones--both approximately eight kilometers southwest of Vi Thanh, Choung Thein Province. The 1st Battalion, 33d Regiment was to initially remain in Vi Thanh as the first reserve; however, two areas within the operational area had been selected as alternate objective areas in the event the primary objective produced no results. The 417th RF Company was to depart nine kilometers south of Vi Thanh, move west by foot two kilometers, and set up a reserve/blocking position. The 2d Battalion, 31st Regiment was to move from Soc Trang to Vi Thanh on the day of the operation and become an immediately available reserve. The 44th Ranger Battalion was to remain in Soc Trang, but on a stand-by basis during the operation. (Map A)

Intelligence: The supply and weapon cache as reported by the Viet Cong deserters was believed to have been guarded by at least two reinforced local guerrilla platoons. The area was known to be a major Viet Cong resupply base and training area with the local populace openly hostile toward government forces. The area was mostly open, dry, rice paddies except along the main canal where thick mangrove vegetation was dominant.

Logistics: Twenty utility helicopters (UH-1D) were allocated for troop transport, escorted by one platoon of gunships (five UH-1B). The gunships were planned to fly reconnaissance and ground support upon completion of their escort mission. Two command and control helicopters were required to control the operation. The 31st Regiment, based at Vi Thanh, was given responsibility for resupplying fuel and munitions to the rotary wing aircraft and for initial establishment of the Division field command post at the Vi Thanh government airfield.

THE 42D RANGER BATTALION PLAN

The 42d Ranger Battalion was divided into two, two hundred man groups designated as force "A and B" and commanded by the battalion commander and battalion executive officer, respectively. Force "A", accompanied by a HO CHAN, would land in the vicinity WR504745 at 0700 and assault west toward a small canal running generally north-south which was the suspected cache area. This group was to search the area designated as objective thirty and then move southwest to the main canal, and then follow this winding canal generally west to link up with force "B." Force "B" was to assault into the second landing zone vicinity WR456722 toward the main canal into objective fifteen, then move generally eastward along the main canal to link up with force "A." Objective fifteen was believed to be a small training camp and the canal area between the two objectives had been used frequently in the past as a rest area for large main force Viet Cong units. Both forces were accompanied by two American advisors; however, the advisors in

the western landing zone were junior noncommissioned officers operating without their advisory team executive officer--a lieutenant with considerable combat operations experience. His absence, due to emergency leave, and the relative inexperience of the junior team members had a far reaching effect early in the operation.

THE 1ST BATTALION, 33D REGIMENT PLAN

Although officially assigned as first reserve, the 1st Battalion was given a "be prepared" mission of assaulting two separate landing zones in the vicinity of WR427676 and WR457626 designated as objectives seven and ten, respectively. For this mission, the battalion commander, based upon the information that twenty utility helicopters (UH-1D) would be available, initially organized his unit into two lifts of two hundred men each. The first lift, consisting of two flights of ten helicopters, would carry two reduced rifle companies reinforced with two 57mm recoilless rifle squads into objective area seven. Upon return of the twenty aircraft to Vi Thanh, a second lift of two hundred men comprised of the remaining rifle company and headquarters company reinforced with one 57mm recoilless rifle, would be transported to objective area ten. The battalion commander was to command the first lift while his executive officer commanded the second lift. Following the normal operating procedures, the unit senior advisor and the advisory team junior noncommissioned officers were to join the first lift while the team executive officer and the senior team non-commissioned officers would accompany the second lift. The lifts

were scheduled twenty minutes apart with two minutes between flights in each lift. Once on the ground, the northern element, designated force "A," was to search the canal area from objective seven eastward and eventually link up with the southern unit, force "B," which was to move along the small canal leading northward from objective ten. Specific instructions were given to the battalion executive officer to give the area around objective nine a particularly thorough search since this area had been reported by the province chief to be a suspected Viet Cong local force platoon base area.

THE 417TH REGIONAL FORCE COMPANY PLAN

The 417th RF Company was to depart their home base nine kilometers south of Vi Thanh, move west two kilometers, and set up a blocking position to compliment the 42d Ranger Battalion plan. Additionally, they were designated as a third reserve force in the event that they were needed. This company, although not as well equipped as the Regular Army battalions, was comprised of eighty men and an American officer advisor, all of which had extensive experience in airmobile operations.

THE 2D BATTALION, 31ST REGIMENT PLAN

The 2d Battalion, 31st Regiment, was to move by truck from Soc Trang to Vi Thanh and be an airmobile reserve for the operation. The starting time for the 2d Battalion would be 0600 hours and was expected to close Vi Thanh by 0900 hours. The unit was provided an 01E observation aircraft for the sixty kilometer move

and, upon arrival at Vi Thanh, was to be prepared for immediate helicopter lift into the operation area.

THE 44TH RANGER BATTALION PLAN

The 44th Ranger Battalion was placed on a stand-by reserve order at their home base--Soc Trang. The unit was provided overlays of the operation and was to assemble transportation for immediate movement to Vi Thanh if the need arose. All personnel were restricted to the unit area, but no further planning was necessary.

NARRATION

At 0615 hours, 15 February 1967, the 417th RF Company crossed the line of departure at WR530720 and established their blocking position vicinity WR513713 at 0650 hours. The move was made without incident, however, several civilians reported that a large Viet Cong unit had passed through the area moving west late the previous night. These sighting reports could not be confirmed but were reported to the Division operation center at Vi Thanh. Between 0600-0630 hours, the entire Vietnamese and American command group had arrived by helicopter at the Vi Thanh airfield from the Division headquarters in Bac Lieu. The first maneuver units arrived at the airfield at approximately 0630 hours. Reporting to the marshalling area thirty minutes prior to lift off time was considered sufficient since both the 42d Ranger Battalion and the 1st Battalion, 33d Regiment, were well trained and experienced in airmobile operations, well lead, and had experienced unit advisors. The helicopters (UH-1D), escorted by one gunship platoon (UH-1B), reported to the airfield just prior to 0700 hours. The aircraft were not scheduled to refuel until after the 42d Ranger Battalion had been inserted into landing zones one and two. (Flying time from Soc Trang to Vi Thanh was approximately thirty minutes.)

At 0700 hours, 15 February 1967, the first lift of the 42d Ranger Battalion, with the Ho Chan, cleared the Vi Thanh airfield enroute to their landing zone (WR504745). A heavy section from the T-Birds (three gunships) was flying escort for the initial lift, reconnoitering the landing zone area for possible Viet Cong. Two gunships

remained at the marshalling area and were on stand-by. This method was an established SOP to insure continual coverage within an operational area.

The first lift was completed without incident by 0710 and the aircraft returned to Vi Thanh to pick up the second lift of Rangers destined for landing zone number two. Within minutes, this lift of 200 men was airborne heading toward their assigned objective. Both flights of the second lift discharged their passengers at 0725-0727 concurrent with the report from force "A" that objective thirty had been secured. At this time, the 42d Ranger Battalion was complete into landing zones one and two and no contact with the Viet Cong had been made. However, approximately thirty minutes later as force "B" searched objective fifteen, they encountered heavy automatic and small arms fire from positions along the canal to the west. During the initial contact, one of the American advisors was killed and the remaining noncommissioned officer became almost completely ineffective due to apparent shock and hysteria of his buddy being killed. Reports from this advisor were almost completely incoherent resulting in confusion and, perhaps, misunderstanding of the Americans in the command post. Information pieced together from the Vietnamese Battalion Executive Officer and the remaining unit advisor indicated that a possible Viet Cong local force company was located at WR453717 and was in an excellent defensive position.

Just prior to this contact, the 1st Battalion, 33d Regiment, had been directed to assault objective seven and ten in the manner

previously discussed. When word reached the command and control helicopter of the "heavy fire" received by the Rangers in the objective fifteen area, the first lift of twenty helicopters was on the final approach into objective seven. This landing was immediately cancelled and the first lift of the 1st Battalion was put into a hold orbit in the vicinity WR366698. Approximately three minutes later, the order was given for the first lift of the 1st Battalion, 33d Regiment, to make an assault landing vicinity WR441706 and overrun any enemy positions. (Map B)

THE LANDING ZONE

During the short period of minutes following cancellation of objective seven, neither the battalion commander or the battalion senior advisor had much time to appropriately coordinate the attack on the new objective area. Further, during this time, the Division FM radio net was cluttered by various stations seeking information about the enemy situation. In particular, the radio traffic passed by the remaining advisor with the Ranger element in contact was of little or no value due to his excitable condition.

As is the general practice, the actual landing was preceded by a heavy fire team of gunships which delivered rockets and machine gun fire on the canal line just north of the landing zone. However, as always, there was no artillery preparation fire on the landing zone. The gunships reported no activity in the immediate area and only very slight small arms sniper fire from the area that the Ranger force reported heavy enemy contact. Additionally, 01E

observation aircraft reported nothing of significant value over the reported contact area. The overall feeling and atmosphere was that the Rangers had landed in the vicinity of a very small Viet Cong force and had been "spooked."

The final approach into the landing zone was on an approximate magnetic azimuth of 50°. There was to be two minutes between flights and the aviation commander decided to touch down approximately 150 meters from the canal line and then break the troop transports right to clear the landing zone as soon as possible.

The first flight of ten transports arrived in the landing zone at approximately 0820 hours. Unlike most heliborne assaults of the 1st Battalion, this landing was marked by some confusion, most of which was directly attributed to conflicting reports of the location of the Ranger unit, and of the Viet Cong force. The most devastating result was that the assault fire was sporadic and poorly coordinated. Further, the actual landing site was located on the extreme southwest tip of the canal protrusion and may have accounted for some misorientation of the assault objective.

As the unit began to organize and move northeast toward the canal, some sporadic small arms fire was received from the canal line. Unfortunately, this was initially taken as stray fire from the Ranger unit, whose location was still generally unknown. However, within a short period of perhaps fifteen seconds, the fire became intense and was joined by 60mm mortar fire, 57mm recoilless rifle fire and numerous automatic weapons fire from enemy positions

from WR442712 - WR443707 - WR451707. The 1st Battalion soldiers could not gain fire superiority and were subsequently pinned down approximately 100 meters from the enemy positions. The second flight of the lift was immediately diverted from the landing zone and resumed the orbit in the vicinity WR366698 pending additional instructions. Information was sent by the 1st Battalion's senior advisor to the command and control ship that the landing zone was not secure and that the force encountered was at least two main force companies. This message was understood, however, the order was given minutes later for the second flight of ten helicopters to be inserted fifty meters to the east of the original landing zone. As this flight came down into the landing zone, it encountered intense automatic weapon and machine gun fire. Friendly fires from armed gunships and the original flight had little suppressing effect on the enemy. As a consequence, the first two helicopters in formation were shot down as they hovered and the majority of the remaining light transports were hit, some seriously. The landing was aborted but approximately fifteen men, including the advisory team executive officer and his important radio, survived the aircraft crashes.

Helicopter gunships were the only immediate fire support available to support the 1st Battalion, but this support could not silence the Viet Cong gun emplacements. Airstrikes were requested and received at 0930 hours and for twenty minutes, VNAF (Vietnamese Air Force) gave outstanding close support with napalm,

bombs, and 20mm cannon fire. As the last strike was put in, the battalion commander ordered his forces to make a frontal attack in order to clear the open rice paddies and effect a penetration into the enemy defensive positions. It was still believed at this time that the enemy forces comprised approximately two main force companies. As the 1st Battalion soldiers attempted to move forward, they were met by a withering Viet Cong defensive fires from their front and, more important, new enemy fires from positions WR428707 - WR437718. The assault was stopped within 75 meters of the canal and a re-evaluation of enemy strengths and positions was hurriedly reported to the command and control helicopter. It was at this time the battalion commander and battalion senior advisor learned that the 2d Battalion, 31st Regiment, had arrived at Vi Thanh and would be immediately committed to reinforce the 1st Battalion. Further, the 44th Ranger Battalion was being airlifted from Soc Trang to Vi Thanh to reinforce the operation.

THE REINFORCEMENTS

The approved plan of operation required the 2d Battalion, 31st Regiment, to move by truck from Soc Trang to Vi Thanh, a distance of approximately 60 kilometers, departing at 0600 hours and arriving at Vi Thanh airfield NLT 0900 hours, 15 February 1967. The 2d Battalion departed Soc Trang on schedule and proceeded along the convoy route approximately 20 kilometers before they were stopped by a bridge that had been blown by local guerrillas during the early morning hours. This delay was immediately relayed through the 0-1 aerial relay, which was providing security cover

for the convoy. Trucks were immediately dispatched from IV Corps Logistical Base, Can Tho, approximately 40 kilometers, providing transportation for the 2d Battalion from the north side of the canal to Vi Thanh airfield. Shortly before the trucks arrived, the battalion commander moved his entire unit across the canal and was prepared to continue the motor march with a minimum amount of delay. Because of this action and initiative, only one hour of travel time was lost. It was during this period that the 2d Battalion was informed that the 1st Battalion, 33d Regiment, was in heavy contact with well over a battalion-size Viet Cong force and that time was a critical factor. Through close cooperation and coordination between the unit commander and advisor, the motor march was conducted in record time and the battalion was able to move to the waiting helicopters at Vi Thanh airfield fully informed of the tactical situation, the current number of transport helicopters, (which was changing rapidly as more aircraft were arriving each minute from recall within IV Corps Tactical Area), and the exact landing zone location for that unit. This was extremely important as time was critical and the 1st Battalion's position was rapidly becoming untenable.

The 2d Battalion, 31st Regiment, was committed in two 210-man lifts to a landing zone approximately 900 meters southeast of the 1st Battalion with orders to link up with the remnants of that unit and make a coordinated attack north into the canal line. Both units were then to attempt to push the enemy from his defensive positions to the east and roll up his left flank. (Map C)

DIVISION REINFORCEMENTS

When it became clear to the division commander that the 1st Battalion, 33d Regiment, was in heavy contact and that the 2d Battalion, 31st Regiment, would be immediately committed upon arrival at Vi Thanh, he moved the 44th Ranger Battalion by air (CV-2B) from Soc Trang to Vi Thanh. In addition, he alerted and initiated orders to move additional forces to reinforce the operation in the event additional forces became necessary.

The 44th Ranger Battalion arrived at Vi Thanh and was committed to the operational area as the 1st and 2d Battalions were making their coordinated assault. The Rangers were also inserted in two 210-man lifts approximately 1,000 meters to the southwest of the 1st Battalion in the vicinity WR427702. Because of the increased lift capability, the entire battalion was on the landing zone and deployed and maneuvered against the enemy in a relatively short period of time. (Map D)

AIR SUPPORT

One reason that the 1st Battalion, 33d Regiment (-) was not annihilated in the landing zone was the availability and use of fighter aircraft and armed helicopters. Concurrent with the first lift at 0700 hours, an airborne forward air controller (FAC) was up to support the operation. The FAC was from Choung Thein Province and was well briefed on the operation and the operational area. One flight of VNAF A-1s was available on stand-by alert at Binh Thuy Air Base, Can Tho, within 10 to 15 minutes to support the

operation. With the 1st Battalion pinned down on the landing zone, air strikes were immediately requested by the Senior Division FAC flying in the command and control helicopter. Air strikes were delivered in a relatively short period of time and were almost continuous for the next four hours. In the coordinated assault, both battalion commanders moved their units forward under the protective shield of air strikes and did not request a lifting or shifting of air strikes until the lead assault elements were within 75 meters of the Viet Cong positions. The air strikes were then shifted to the east and northeast to inflict the maximum number of casualties possible on the withdrawing enemy.

Another important aspect of the air support was the helicopter gunship support during the initial phase of the operation and during the slack periods of the high performance air strikes. The daring ability of the gunships and the rapid response to fire missions from the battalion commanders and advisors accounted for numerous enemy automatic weapons being knocked out. Once the high performance air strikes were lifted and shifted during the assault, the gunships became the primary assault fire support and supported both battalions practically into the objectives. When both battalions had closed on their objective, the gunships flew interdiction to the east of the operation area.

THE ASSAULT

With the 1st Battalion (-) and the 2d Battalion deployed on the ground, and part of the 42d Ranger Battalion in a blocking position in the vicinity objective fifteen, and with the assault

supported by air strikes and gunships, General Minh, the Division Commander, believed that sufficient combat power was massed to penetrate and overrun the enemy's defensive positions. Both battalions surged forward and rapidly closed on the enemy's positions. Although the enemy had sustained a tremendous air bombardment, he was not ready to yield or withdraw from his trenches, foxholes, and bunkers. The enemy realized that once he left his protective shelters, he would be forced to withdraw through continuous air strikes or be extremely vulnerable to the ever waiting gunships. The enemy battalion commander decided to stand and fight and based his defense on several machine guns which were well emplaced and protected.

The 1st Battalion, unable to knock out a machine gun that was causing havoc in their area, was stopped and pinned down approximately 50 meters from the enemy's position. The battalion senior advisor requested a gunship strike to eliminate the machine gun. The gunships quickly responded and although having only a 50-meter troop safety factor, delivered highly accurate fire and silenced the machine gun. The 1st Battalion then closed to within 15 meters of the enemy's position and were again stopped by a last ditch effort of the enemy to hold their positions. The battalion executive officer, encouraged by an advisor, ordered all available soldiers to throw hand grenades into the enemy trenches, which silenced numerous Viet Cong positions. A penetration was effected by the 1st Battalion which allowed the reserve company

of the 2d Battalion to quickly exploit the penetration and rapidly move deep into the objective area. During the assault, fierce hand-to-hand fighting took place with a large portion of the 1st Battalion's casualties sustained during this phase. The 1st Battalion was successful in penetrating and overwhelming the enemy position and in limited pursuit caused the enemy to withdraw to the northeast.

The 2d Battalion, moving forward in the assault with the 1st Battalion, was also stopped short of the objective by machine gun fire. The battalion commander ordered the 57mm recoilless rifle squad to engage and eliminate the enemy machine gun. The 57mm recoilless rifle squad immediately engaged the machine gun but was unable to silence the gun. After four or five shots, the 57mm recoilless rifle squad came under intense small arms and automatic weapons fire, sustained several casualties, and was unable to continue in its efforts to knock out the machine gun. The battalion commander, realizing that the success of his unit's assault depended upon knocking out the machine gun, moved laterally to the enemy positions, secured the 57mm recoilless rifle and under intense fire delivered accurate fire on the machine gun, silencing the gun. The 2d Battalion again moved forward and utilizing hand grenades was able to penetrate the enemy position in several places. During the penetration, fierce hand-to-hand fighting took place, not only from the enemy within their zone, but also with the enemy that was withdrawing from the 1st Battalion area.

The 44th Ranger Battalion landed as the 1st and 2d Battalions were in the assault phase; however, all Viet Cong units were withdrawing to the northeast and the Rangers were all but uncontested as they swept through their objective.

The objective, after a five-hour battle, was secured and consolidated with a thorough search conducted for enemy prisoners and weapons. Three hundred thirty-one (331) Viet Cong bodies were counted, numerous weapons, communication equipment, documents, and six (6) Viet Cong prisoners were captured. These prisoners revealed that the enemy force engaged was the Viet Cong 303 main force battalion with heavy weapons company and two companies of the U-Minh 10 local force battalion.

The operation continued throughout the night with sporadic sniper contact probing the perimeter. On 15 February 1967, additional battalions were committed in helicopter pursuit but contact was not re-established. The operation officially ended 1800 hours, 16 February 1967.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

Operation Dan Chi 279 B conducted on 15-16 February 1967, in Choung Thein Province, Republic of Vietnam, was one of the heaviest fought and significant operations conducted within the 42d DTA 21st Infantry Division (ARVN) in recent times. The operation is significant in that the coordinated attack of the 1st Battalion, 33d Regiment, and 2d Battalion, 31st Regiment, penetrated and partially overran a Viet Cong main force battalion, killing 331

enemy in a five-hour battle. Dan Chi 279 B also pointed out that if ARVN is properly trained and led, they are willing and capable of conducting major operations with positive results and minimum US support. This should be the long range goal of the US Army.

The division commander's initial concept was tactically and logically sound. Based upon available intelligence information, he made maximum utilization of available troops; however, his use and availability of reserve forces can easily be questioned.

The intelligence for the operation that only two local guerrilla platoons were guarding the supply and munitions cache was considered reliable by regiment, division, and US Intelligence advisors. However, since the operational area was a major Viet Cong supply and training area, the division commander ordered one Infantry battalion and one Ranger battalion to be reserve for the operation. The 303d Battalion that had moved into the operation area early in the morning on 15 February 1967 had been reported approximately 50 kilometers north. This area was also the extreme southern most operational area of this Viet Cong battalion.

The Battalion Commander, 1st Battalion, 33d Regiment, was a competent leader and highly professional officer with a tremendous amount of combat/helicopter combat assault experience. He had fully trained and personally revived a battalion that had previously been considered as one of the less effective battalions within the division. His knowledgeable detailed planning and orders in preparation for the operation, coupled with his level-headed thinking under

adverse conditions, were the primary reasons that his battalion was not annihilated on the landing zone. He also developed his company commanders and other junior officers to take the initiative and accept responsibility on their own under difficult circumstances, which were prevalent throughout the operation.

The 2d Battalion, 31st Regiment, because of its battalion commander, was considered one of the best battalions of the division and on numerous occasions, the battalion had been similarly employed. The battalion commander generally listened to his advisors and knew how to exploit to the fullest extent possible US Army support during operations. Although wounded numerous times during previous combat operations, he returned each time, at his own request, to again lead his battalion. The battalion commander later became the 31st Regimental Commander and was promoted early to Lieutenant Colonel.

The initial operation as planned never really had an opportunity to develop. However, because of proper planning by both the Vietnamese and advisors, flexibility was inherent within the operation.

Both battalion commanders displayed a high degree of professionalism under adverse conditions. The reactions of the 1st Battalion Commander when he became aware that the objective area was occupied by more than two enemy companies played a significant part in preventing his reinforced company from being annihilated. The subsequent positioning and instructions in directing his companies while subject to intense fire resulted in successfully penetrating and exploiting the Viet Cong defensive positions.

The 2d Battalion Commander moved his battalion approximately 60 kilometers, crossed an obstacle, conducted a helicopter assault, deployed his entire battalion, and conducted a frontal coordinated assault on entrenched enemy positions with minimum difficulty. He was quick to coordinate with the 1st Battalion and was thoroughly briefed and ready to move into the operation area upon arrival at Vi Thanh. He was not only able to effectively manage his battalion but displayed a tremendous amount of valor at the proper time to keep his portion of the assault moving.

With the 1st and 2d Battalions rapidly closing with the enemy, reinforced by part of the 42d Ranger Battalion, the landing of the 44th Ranger Battalion to the southeast of the 1st Battalion served no realistic tactical value. The 44th Ranger Battalion should have been placed to the northeast to effectively block the subsequent withdrawal of the enemy. Realizing that the Ranger Battalion would have had to be lifted in on two plus lifts, they could have been landed sufficiently distant for the battalion commander to deploy his battalion and to stop an estimated 600 withdrawing Viet Cong. As was pointed out earlier, the Ranger Battalion practically swept through its objective uncontested.

The reconnoitering of landing zones by gunships is not always sufficient. Although an entire reinforced Viet Cong battalion was in the area, the gunships were not able to detect them. The Viet

Cong, because of our air superiority, are master of camouflage. This concludes that additional means must be devised to detect or eliminate Viet Cong positions. A preparation of landing zones by artillery or air strikes would be a recommended solution with emphasis placed on artillery preparation. However, one platoon of artillery will not satisfactorily be able to fire preparatory fires.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. A close inspection of Map D will show an attempt to develop conventional battle lines, hoping to persuade an elusive insurgent main force battalion into fighting a traditional battle. An enemy that will only fight on grounds of his choosing will not stand and fight if he does not have all the advantages, but will withdraw at the first opportune time. This is because the enemy has no heavy artillery or air support and does not expect reinforcements.

Once an enemy force is fixed, the primary effort should be to encircle and isolate the enemy before closing, to ensure complete elimination of the insurgent force.

2. Tactical employment and utilization of artillery in support of combat operations within Choung Thein Province never amounted to more than a token force (one platoon). Although five platoons of artillery were permanently assigned to Choung Thein Province, they were all employed on static defensive missions and seldom moved. This was mainly because all Regional Force and Popular

Force defensive outposts were planned and protected by the 105 Howitzer artillery fan. In a counterinsurgency environment, it is extremely difficult to know or to even estimate when an outpost will be attacked and when the artillery would be needed to support an outpost. It was too often evident that the Vietnamese commanders would not take the calculated risk of moving the artillery.

Artillery, to be effective, must be massed in at least battery size. This was not possible in Choung Thein Province because of the primary missions of the artillery platoons and the distance and remote locations of the platoon.

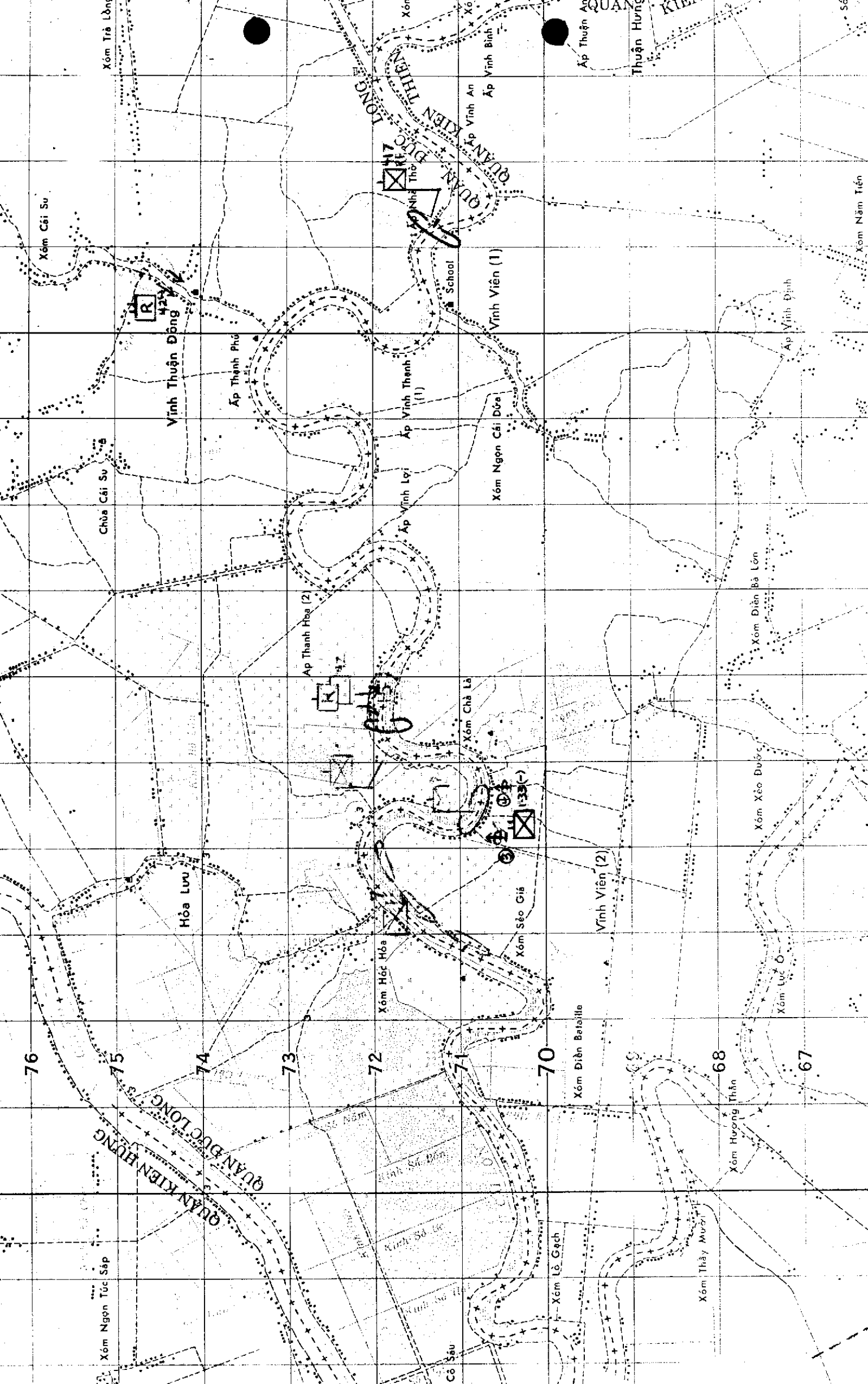
To insure adequate artillery support for operations, at least one battery should be made available to each regiment with the primary mission of direct support.

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MAP "A"

MAP "B"



Xóm Trà Lòn

Xóm Cái Su

Chùa Cái Su

Vinh Thuận Đông

Ấp Thành Phố

QUAN KIEN THINH
QUAN BUC LONG

Thôn Nhì

School

Vinh Viên (1)

Ấp Vinh Thành (1)

Ấp Vinh Lợi

Xóm Ngọn Cái Dừa

Ấp Thanh Hòa (2)

Xóm Chả Lả

Hòa Lưu

Xóm Hóc Hòa

Xóm Sáo Giã

Vinh Viên (2)

76

75

74

73

72

71

70

QUAN KIEN HUNG
QUAN BUC LONG

Xóm Diên Bataille

68

Xóm Hương Thần

Xóm Xảo Duộc

Xóm Lục Ô

67

Xóm Ngọn Túc Sáp

Kính Sở Lạc

Cổ Sầu

Xóm Lò Gạch

Xóm Thầy Mươi

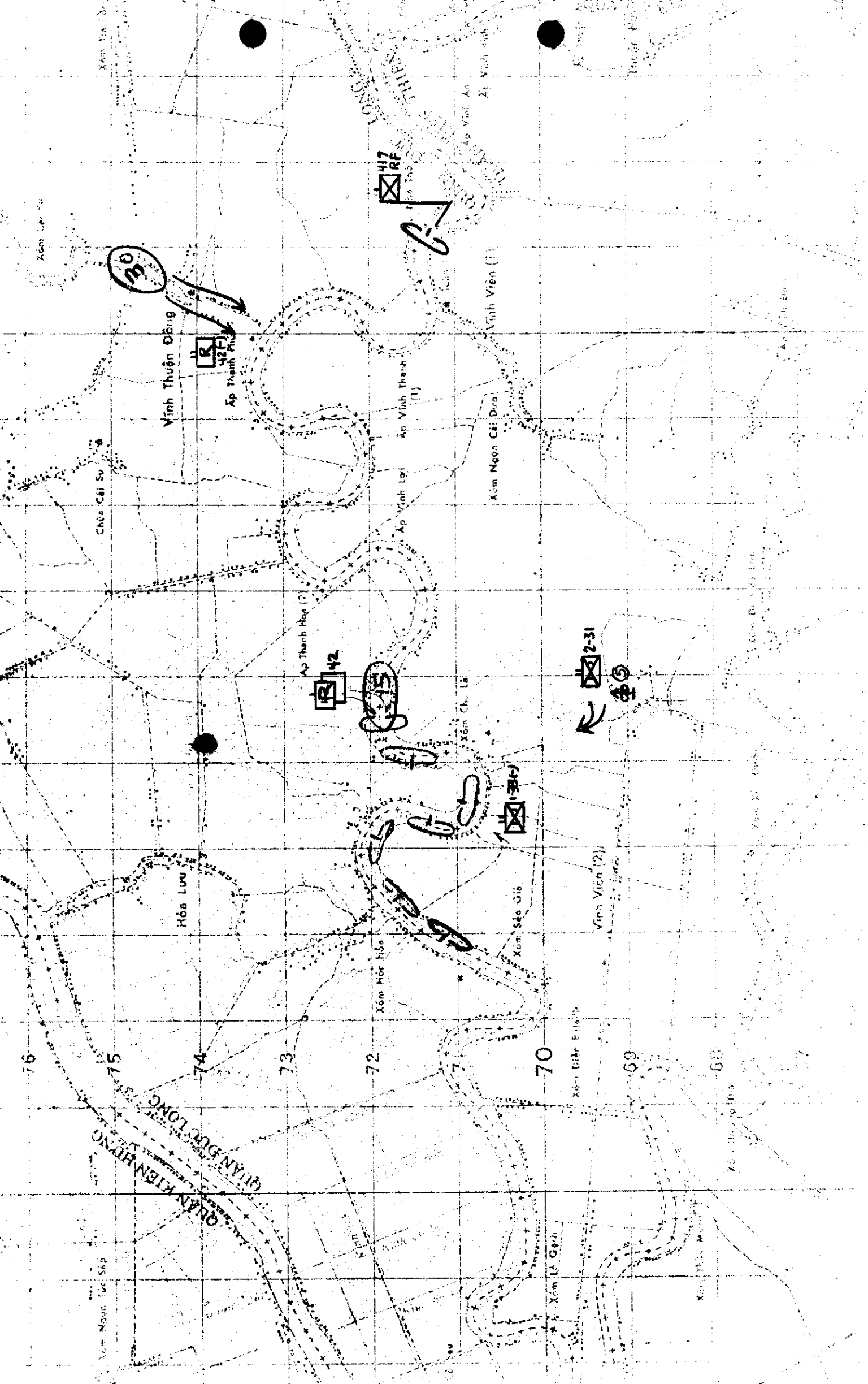
Ấp Thuận An

Thuận Hưng

Xóm Năm Tiến

Ấp Vinh Định

MAP "C"



Xóm Tân Lập

Xóm Cầu Ông

Chùa Cầu Sứ

Xóm Mộng Túc Sếp

Vinh Thuận Đông

Xp Thành Phố

Xp Thành Hòa (?)

Xóm Hồ Hòa

72

Xóm Sỏi Giỏ

70

Xóm Diên Phước

Vinh Viên (2)

42-31

417 RF

6

Vinh Viên (1)

Xóm Ch. Lã

42-30

69

68

Xóm Hòa Bình

Xóm Tân Bình

Xóm Ngọc Cai Dừa

Xóm Đ. S. B. B.

Xóm Tân Phước

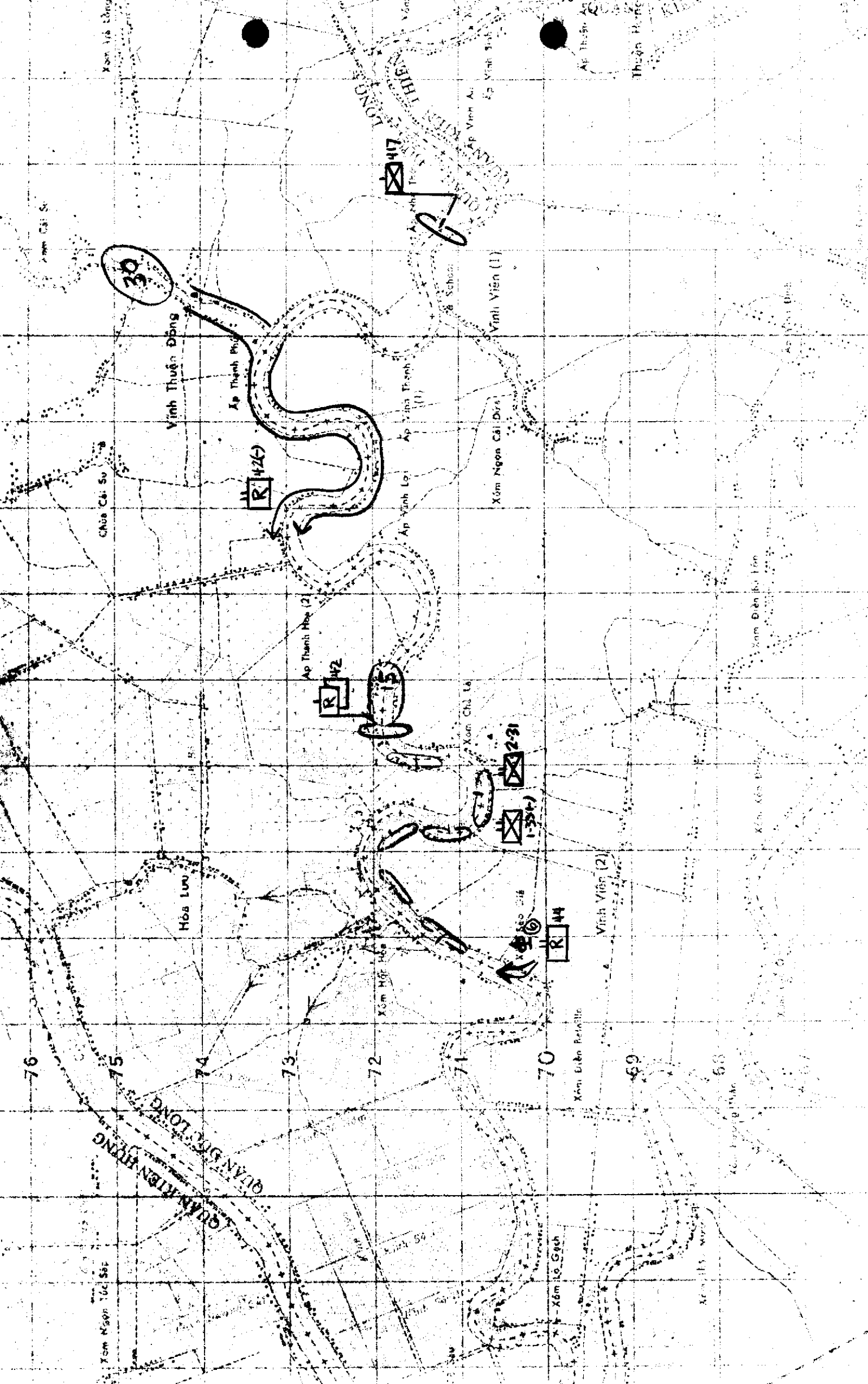
Xóm Tân An

Xóm Vĩnh An

Xóm Vĩnh Bình

QUAN KIEN HONG
QUAN BUC LONG

MAP "D"



30

Vinh Thuan Dong

Ap Thanh Phu

R 420

R 417

6

Ap Thanh Hoa (2)

R 422

15

R 231

134

R 414

Vinh Vien (2)

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr 100 500

QUAN DIEN HONG

QUAN DIEN LONG

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr (3)

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr (4)

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr (5)

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr (6)

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr (7)

Xom Chua La

Xom Dien Biet Slic

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr (8)

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr (9)

Vinh Vien (2)

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr (10)

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr (11)

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr (12)

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr (13)

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr (14)

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr (15)

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr (16)

Xom Dien Biet Lon

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr (17)

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr (18)

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr (19)

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr (20)

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr (21)

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr (22)

Ap Thanh Phu

Ap Thanh Phu

Ap Thanh Phu

Ap Thanh Phu

Ap Thanh Phu

Ap Thanh Phu

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr

Xom Ngon Cai Dyr

Ap Vinh Ai

Ap Vinh Ai

Ap Vinh Ai

Ap Vinh Ai

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Ap Vinh Ai

Ap Vinh Ai

Ap Thanh Phu

Ap Thanh Phu

Ap Thanh Phu

Ap Thanh Phu

Ap Thanh Phu

Ap Thanh Phu

Ap Thanh Phu

Ap Thanh Phu

Thuan Hung

Thuan Hung

Thuan Hung

Thuan Hung

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