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AGAM-P (M) (7 Aug 68) FOR OT RD 68X050

16 August 1968

SUBJECT: Combat After Action Report - Op QUANG TRI, 14th Military
Det., 1st Cavalry Division, Period 31 Jan - 6 Feb 1968 (U)

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Kenneth G. Wickham
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3

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

BATTLE OF QUANG TRI
31 January - 6 February 1968

Prepared by
14th-Mil-Hist Det
1 April 1968

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68X050

Early on the morning of 31 January 1968, the 812th NVA Regiment and supporting elements launched a concerted attack on the provincial capital of Quang Tri. The attack was part of the enemy's general TET Offensive which engulfed all of South Vietnam in a wave of violence. The initial enemy force to penetrate the city was a platoon sized unit from the 10th Sapper Battalion which began infiltration on the evening of 30 January. Its mission was to commit acts of sabotage and destruction within the city coincident with an attack by ground troops from the 812th Regiment, (K4, K5 and K6 battalions), 814th VC Main Force Battalion, and the 808th VC Main Force Battalion. The enemy attack was to have started at 0200 hours on 31 January, and accordingly the Sappers went into action at that time, necessarily revealing their presence and intentions. The ground attack by the 812th Regiment was delayed because of navigational difficulties imposed by the rain swollen streams and the inexperience of the participating troops. The internal defense forces of the city, composed of popular forces and elements of the First ARVN Regiment, were thus able to concentrate on the sappers before the main attack, killing or capturing the majority of them. The premature action of the sappers alerted the city's defenders to the impending attack.

The 812th Regiment attacked at 0420 hours on 31 January on a multiple front. K-4 Battalion attacked from the east, penetrating the city at several points. K-4 was to make the main attack with its objective being the left gate of the Quang Tri Citadel Wall and the Sector Headquarters. K-4 was to destroy the artillery unit within the compound and occupy the prison. After one day, K-4 would withdraw and be replaced by K-6. K-6 Battalion attacked from the southeast through the La Vang Thuong complex (YD 360491) coming into the city on a route between the railroad and Highway 1. Its mission was to attack the La Vang Base Area. The K-5 Battalion was the regimental reserve and was to occupy positions southeast of Quang Tri City in the vicinity of Hai Lang (YD 430490). See Sketch "A".

57. The 814th Bn (MF) was to play a secondary role in the attack on Quang Tri, being subordinate to the 812th Regiment during the operation. Upon completion of the occupation of Quang Tri, the 812th (K-14) Battalion (MF) would occupy the whole city allowing the 812th Regiment to redeploy in a crescent formation on the southern side of Quang Tri to block ARVN and US Forces coming from Hue.

The 808th (K-8) MF Battalion appeared to have a supporting role during the attack. Its mission was to block ARVN units from reinforcing the city from the north and to reinforce the K-14 Battalion's actions on the northern portion of the city. K-8 made a feeble attempt at both of these missions during the course of the battle.

The brunt of the attack fell upon the defending ARVN Forces in and around the city, composed, not only of the 1st ARVN Regiment and their attached APC Troop but also on the 9th ARVN Airborne Battalion and Police and Popular Force elements. The 1st ARVN Regiment had two battalions and the parachute battalion oriented north and northwest of the city protecting revolutionary development areas. One battalion was located along route 555 northeast of Quang Tri, while one battalion was in the city itself. The Airborne Battalion was located in the Tri Buu Area (YD 345535).

The 814th VC Battalion attacked Quang Tri from the north through Tri Buu where it was decisively engaged by the 9th Airborne Battalion and was unable to enter the city. However, the pressure on the defending ARVN forces remained very heavy and they were gradually forced to fall back into the city contesting every foot of ground as they withdrew. Although the enemy had been unable to take over the city, they were exerting a terrific amount of pressure on it's defenders, and by noon of the 31st the outcome of the battle remained in the balance. See Sketch "B".

6

Shortly after noon on 31 January, the Province Advisor, Mr Robert Brewer, held a conference with the 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division Commander, Colonel Donald V Rattan and the senior US advisor to the 1st ARVN Regiment, Major Font. Mr Brewer stated that the situation in the city was still highly tenuous, that the enemy had infiltrated at least a battalion and that the defending forces were badly in need of assistance. At that time it appeared that the enemy was reinforcing from the east and that he had established his fire support positions on the eastern and southern fringes of the city. See Sketch "C". Recognizing the gravity of the situation, Colonel Rattan with the concurrence of General Tolson, the Division Commander, agreed to reorient his brigade and attack to the east of the city.

The 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, had arrived in the Quang Tri area on 25 January, having moved up from Hue-Phu Bai after initially deploying on 17 January from Bong Son. The Brigade's mission upon arrival in their new location was to move into the area south of Quang Tri and prepare to launch an attack into the enemy's Base Area 101 which is located roughly 15 kilometers southwest of Quang Tri City. One of the brigade's additional missions was to protect the approaches into the city from the south and southwest. The brigade was not oriented to a role of protecting the city itself. When the attack came on 31 January, all of its elements were located to the south and west of the city with one fire base as far away as 20 kilometers west of the city. The Brigade Headquarters, LZ Betty and its other LZ's, in addition to the ARVN base camp at La Vang, had been under sporadic rocket and mortar attack since before dawn. Despite these handicaps, the Brigade was able to react extremely quickly to the changed situation. The 1/8 Cavalry remained in the northern part of Base Area 101 to protect the fire bases which had been established. The 1/502 Airborne Battalion, which was under the operational control of the Brigade, continued its base defense mission with all of

7. its elements. This left the 1/12 Cavalry and 1/5 Cavalry free to maneuver against the attacking enemy.

Mr Brewer indicated the most probable locations of enemy infiltration and support positions, and accordingly, landing zones were selected on or adjacent to them by Col Rattan. The assault areas were selected for the purposes of reducing the enemy's reinforcing capability in the city by blocking the avenues of approach; eliminating his fire support capability by landing on his support areas; and blocking or impeding the withdrawal of his forces already engaged in the city. At approximately 1345 hours, the battalions were directed to launch their air assaults as soon as possible with priority on lift assigned to the 1/12th. Additional aircraft were requested from division resources and the 1/9th Cavalry Squadron and ARA ships were alerted.

By 1555 hours, 1/12 Cavalry had air assaulted its B Company to an LZ east of Quang Tri City north of the village of Than An Thai (YD360250). Immediately thereafter, C Company was air assaulted southeast of the village (YD 359508) and B Company 1/5 Cavalry under the 12th Cavalry's control was landed north of B 1/12 Cavalry (YD 358538).

On landing, C 1/12 immediately began receiving intense fire from an estimated enemy company, fire being brought on the helicopters as they came in. The contact lasted until about 1900 hours as the surprised and confused enemy fought C Company with machine guns, mortars, and recoilless rifles. After sustaining heavy casualties, the enemy broke contact leaving 29 bodies. B Company 1/12 Cavalry also became engaged shortly after it had landed. The fight lasted until about 2000 hours when the enemy broke contact, leaving 34 bodies behind. The 1/12 Cavalry air assaults straddled the heavy weapons support of the K-4 Battalion. The enemy battalion thus found itself heavily engaged on the eastern edge of Quang Tri by the ARVN, and in its rear among its support elements by 1/12 Cavalry. Caught between the two forces, it was quickly rendered ineffective.

8

Shortly after the 1/12th Cavalry launched its attack, A and C Companies, 1/5th Cavalry, air assaulted southeast of Quang Tri. C Company landed near the village of Thong Thuong Xo (YD 372494) and became heavily engaged by 1840 hours as they searched north of their LZ. A Company, 1/5th Cavalry, landed just south of Highway 1 and established a blocking position (YD372493), to interdict any enemy efforts to use the road. C Company 1/5th Cavalry's contact coupled with aggressive, hard hitting support from Aerial Rocket Artillery, and the 1st Brigade scout helicopters, created pandemonium in the K-6 Battalion rear. Like its sister battalion, the K-6 found itself wedged between ARVN Forces and Cavalrymen, and sustaining a terrific pounding from the air and artillery. See Sketch "D".

As darkness fell, it became apparent that the shattered enemy had had enough, and he was attempting to break contact and withdrew. It was difficult for large units to infiltrate through the Cavalry companies, and his forces rapidly broke down into small groups, some individuals even attempting to get away among the crowds of fleeing refugees. Contacts were made throughout the night with many small enemy groups trying to get out of the city. Throughout the First of February, the disorganized enemy units sought to avoid contact and move away from the city. They had suffered a terrible mauling from the ARVN defenders within Quang Tri and had been smashed and demoralized by the air assaults, gunships, and ARA of the 1st Cavalry Division. Although well equipped, they appeared to be inexperienced and were obviously completely unfamiliar with the Air Cavalry techniques of warfare. Aerial Rocket Artillery and helicopter gunships experienced unusual success against enemy troops, suffering the loss of only 3 aircraft to enemy groundfire. The enemy troops would attempt to play "dead" as a helicopter approached, seldom attempting to return fire. A further example of their inexperience is that their mortar gunners frequently forgot to extract the shipping plugs from

9
their rounds before firing, thus firing numerous duds.

By noon on 1 February, Quang Tri City had been cleared of the enemy, and the 1st Brigade immediately initiated the pursuit. Moving in ever increasing concentric circles with the city as the hub, Brigade elements relentlessly harried the demoralized enemy. A Company, 1/502d Airborne, made a heavy contact with a large well armed enemy force south of Quang Tri near a large cathedral (YD 340480) killing 76 of the enemy with the help of ARA and the 1st Brigade Scouts. D Company, 1/12 Cavalry, was air assaulted into the battle area, and made heavy contact with an enemy force near the Song Nhung River (YD 377524) east of Quang Tri. Other units of the 1st Brigade made numerous smaller contacts throughout the day. The pursuit was to be continued throughout the first ten days of February, long after Quang Tri City itself had been successfully defended.

The original enemy plans, made long before the 1st Brigade arrived in the Quang Tri area, obviously did not consider the mobility combat power of an air cavalry brigade. Although the enemy knew that the 1st Brigade was in the area after 25 January, he must have either ignored the brigade or figured that it was deployed so far to the southwest (in Base Area 101) that it could not react quickly enough to influence the battle.

It became apparent during the battle that the enemy did not realize how vulnerable he would be if caught in the open by the Cavalry gunships and ARA ships. Also, he was not used to the Cavalry scouting techniques with armed H-13s and gunships flying detailed armed reconnaissance missions at tree top level.

The city of Quang Tri was without doubt one of the major objectives of the TET Offensive. Its successful defense was one of the highlights of allied engagements taking place during the crucial period. Three major factors contributed to the allied success:

a. The tenacious defense within and around the city by the ARVN forces to include the various PF, RF, and reconnaissance and National Police units.

b. The timely and accurate tactical intelligence of enemy locations provided to the 1st Brigade by Mr. Brewer, the Senior Province Advisor, at noon on the 31st.

c. The unique ability of the 1st Cavalry Division to completely change the orientation of units and to attack in a 180 degree opposite direction on extremely short notice.

The enemy paid a high price for his failure. During the period 31 January to 6 February 1968, the enemy suffered the following losses.

KIA by ARVN 553 (Mostly on 31 Jan in Quang Tri)

PW by ARVN 65

WPNS captured by ARVN 245

KIA by 1st CAV DIV 381

PW by 1st CAV DIV 3

WPNS captured by 1st CAV DIV 86

TOTALS

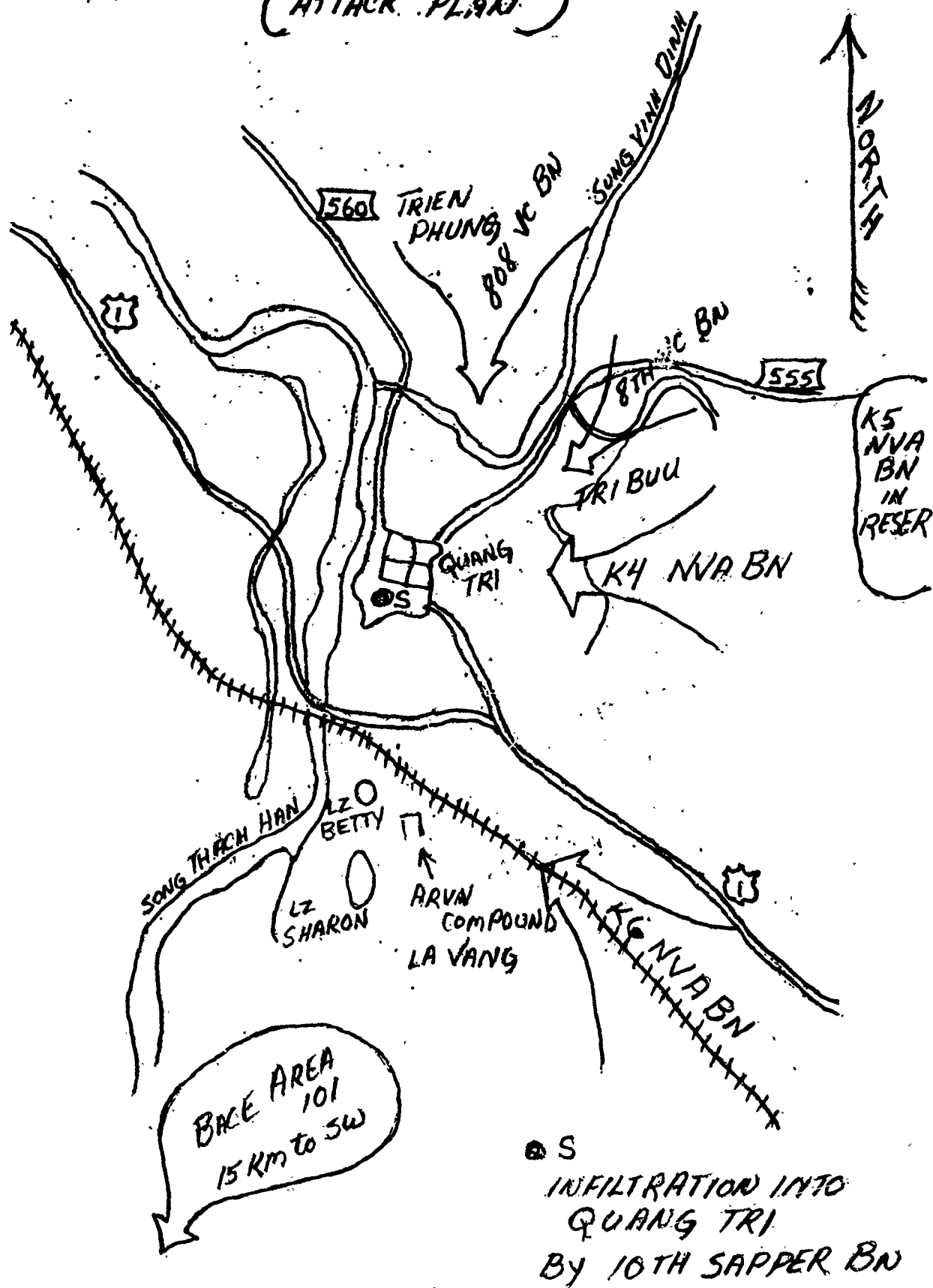
Enemy KIA 914

PW 86

WPNS captured 331

Note: 753 82mm and 36 B-40 rocket rounds were also captured by the 1st Cavalry units east and southeast of Quang Tri during the period 31 January to 6 February.

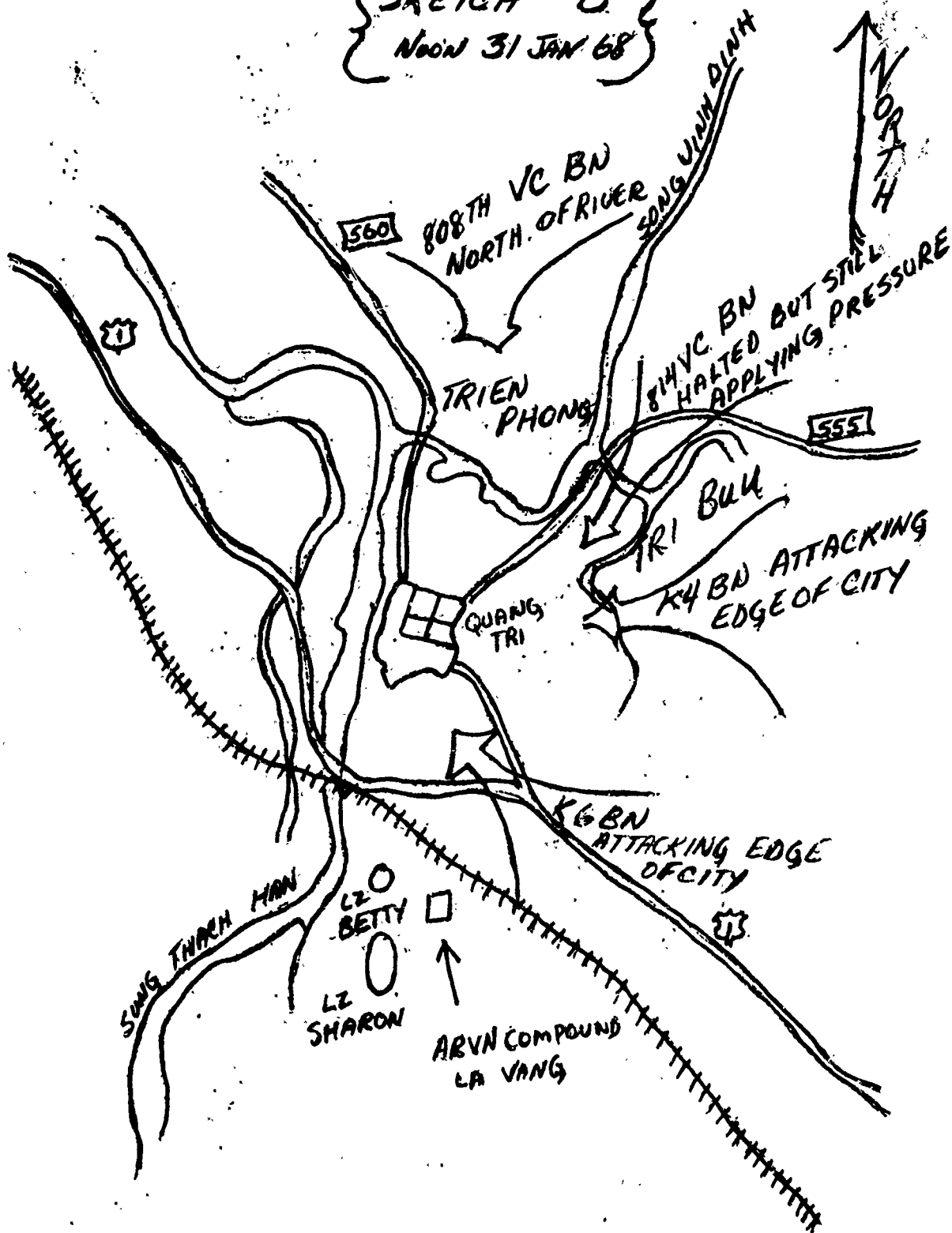
{ SKETCH "A" } ATTACK PLAN



{ SKETCH "B" }

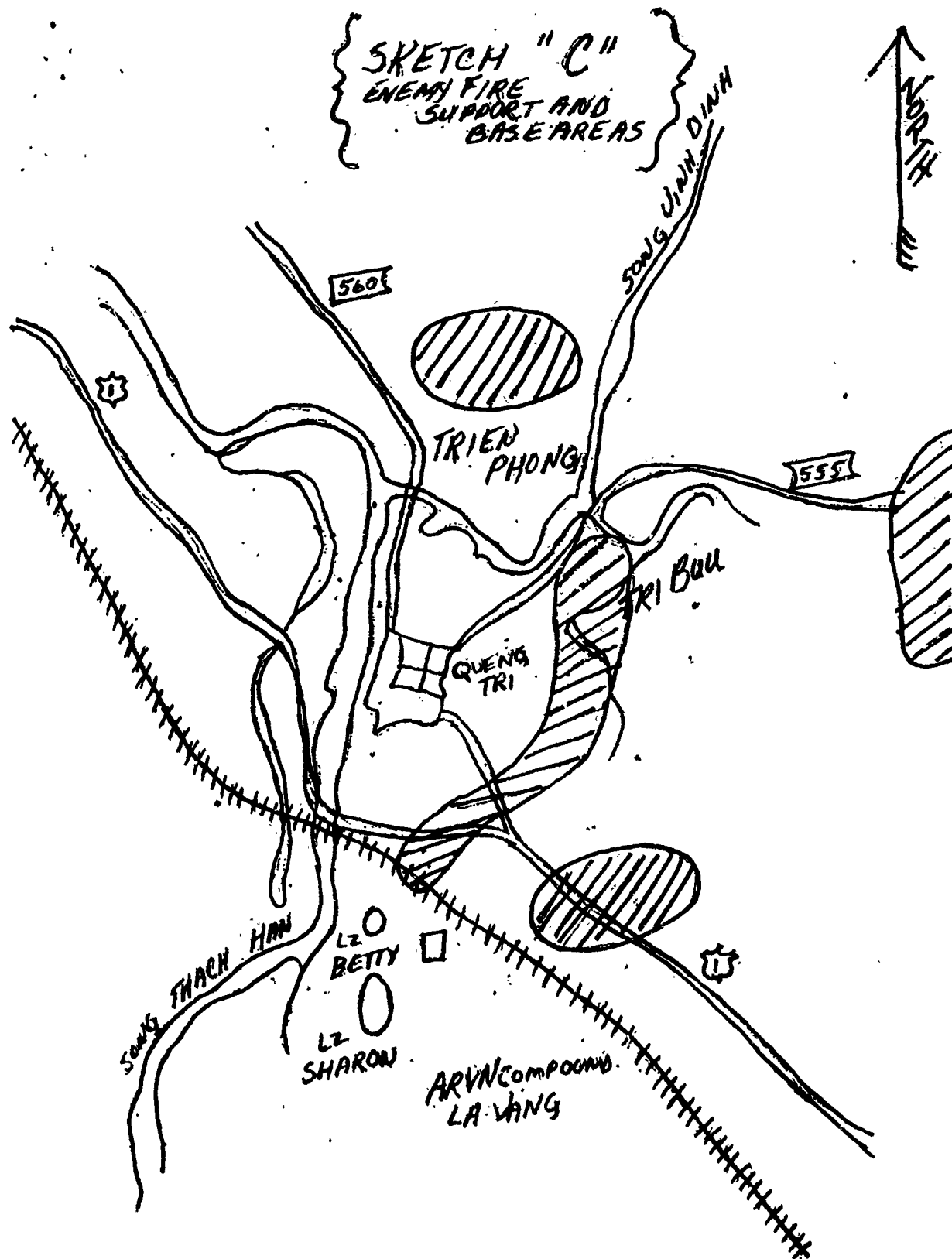
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SKETCH "C"
ENEMY FIRE
SUPPORT AND
BASE AREAS

↑ NORTH



14



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12

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17

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18

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