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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS
1ST BATTALION (MECHANIZED), 50TH INFANTRY
173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE
APO San Francisco 96250

29 May 1968

SUBJECT: After-Action Report - The Battle of An Bao

1. (U) Operation: Cochise
2. (U) Period Covered: 5-7 May 1968
3. (U) Location: My Loc (V), Phu My District, Binh Dinh Province, RVN.
4. (U) Command HQ: 1st Bn (M), 50th Inf, 173d Airborne Brigade.
5. (U) Reporting Officer: Captain Richard P Guthrie, 1st Bn (M), 50th Inf
6. (C) Task Organization: Co A (-), B, C, 1/50 Inf, Co B, 1/69 Tank Battalion.
7. (C) Supporting Forces:
C Btry, 7/13 Artillery
B Btry, 7/15 Artillery
FAC Det, 173d Abn Bde
Avn Section, 173d Abn Bde
8. Intelligence:
 - a. For several days prior to 5 May, our own sources and those of neighboring friendly units indicated the presence of an enemy unit somewhere in the Southwestern Crescent foothills. On 4 May, the reports stated that a unit (Regimental CP and Arty Bn, designation unknown), was located vicinity coordinates BR895784.
 - b. Further local enemy activity took place in the form of a very unsuccessful probe on LZ Ollie on the night of 4 May. A composite platoon of tanks and APC's positioned at Ollie after dark quickly sent the would-be attackers on their way.
9. Mission: Co A (-) conducts reconnaissance in Force vicinity BR895783.
10. Concept of Operations: Co A minus 1 platoon securing LZ Uplift moves north on highway QL 1, turning west at LZ Ichiban and proceeds to target area.
11. Execution:
 - a. General: Co A (-) and Co D had been conducting this sort of mission

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for several days with no significant findings. On 5 May 1968, 9 APC's and 50 personnel proceeded on the assigned mission, departing LZ Uplift at 0748 hours.

- b. Nothing significant was sighted as the unit proceeded toward the objective area until they arrived in the vicinity BR906795. At that location, the lead elements discovered several fresh spider holes and a pair of black pajamas which apparently had been hung on a hedgerow to dry. The terrain at this location is generally open and rolling with a ridge line to the south; the fingers of the ridge are covered with dense scrub brush; the low land between the fingers is cultivated rice paddy.
- c. At 1002 hours, LT Dennis E Hinton reported that his unit had seen approximately 15 males in black pajamas moving rapidly away from the Co A axis of advance. (See Sketch 1, point 1. The sighting was to the west of the company (-) position. He immediately called for artillery reconnaissance by fire and fired direct fire with his track mounted M-60 and Cal .50 machine guns. As Co A (-) advanced toward the location of the sighting, the elements continued to fire small arms and 60mm mortar. A thorough search was made of the area which revealed two NVA packs near some holes. The company (-) pulled into a defensive perimeter, sent out one OP, and secured the area for the noon meal. (See Diagram A).
- d. Contact was initiated by the enemy at 1144 hours by directing a volley of 57 recoilless fires at and into the perimeter which almost immediately disabled 5 of the 9 APC's. These fires evidently signaled the launching of a ground assault, with the main effort coming from the high ground SW of the burning vehicles. Automatic, small arms and anti-tank weapons fire began pouring in on Co A (-) from the SE, Northeast and Northwest. Returning fire in the greatest volume possible, LT Hinton requested reinforcement, gunships and tactical air strikes. The Artillery FO's radio was destroyed by the initial volley of fire and no one on the ground had communications with the supporting artillery battalions. LT Hinton's last command before he was mortally wounded was "Get the hell out of here ASAP." Those personnel in APC's which were still operational attempted to pick up those who were fighting dismounted. Because of the confusion and heavy volume of incoming anti-tank fires, a complete pickup was not effected and the mounted elements withdrew from the area as ordered. (See Sketch 1). The highest ranking individual in the mounted element was a Sergeant E-5. As this element arrived at RT 1, the personnel hailed wheeled vehicles travelling on the highway and effected medical evacuation to LZ Uplift of the more seriously wounded, then returned to LZ Uplift.

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The majority of these personnel had been wounded. The flame thrower track with this element had expended its load, then took a direct hit and was on fire with the gunner laying unconscious inside the vehicle. This track burned for several hours after it departed the area of contact.

- e. The dismounted survivors of Co A (-) in the contact area numbered approximately 15. They were rapidly organized by LT Frank W Webb in a small perimeter to the Northeast of the burning vehicles. (See Sketch 1). The terraced paddies afforded some protection from the main enemy attack, but left their rear exposed. LT Webb moved among the survivors consolidating the position, redistributing ammunition and asking for help over the one remaining radio. Sniper fires from the unprotected Northeastern portion of LT Webb's position took a heavy toll, and LT Webb was killed by small arms fire as he moved from position to position.
- f. Co C was located at LZ Uplift and had been performing maintenance for several hours when the violent contact was initiated. CPT Jay C Copley was alerted and moved from LZ Uplift at 1212 hours. The briefing which CPT Copley received was extremely vague because of the lack of information from the ground troops. CPT Copley was instructed to follow the tracks made by Co A and to move west towards the smoke.
- g. Co B, 1/69 Armor (-), also performing maintenance at LZ Uplift, was alerted at the same time as Co C (-) 1/50 Inf and was instructed to move to the contact area to assist in the relief of Co A (-) 1/50. Co B (-) 1/69 Armor departed LZ Uplift at 1221 hours. CPT Timothy Grogan CO, Co B, 1/69 Armor was instructed to move North on QL 1 to LZ Ichiban, then turn Northwest and then West into the contact area. CPT Grogan did not know the location of LZ Ichiban and was not certain of the turn off point to the contact area. Consequently, his element overshot the turnoff and turned West from the highway approximately 1500 meters north of the desired location. (See Sketch #2). One tank became mired in a stream crossing; another was left to secure it and the remainder of the Company (-), numbering 5 tanks, moved back to the South and entered the paddy on the axis shown in Sketch #2.
- h. CPT Grogan's mired tank reported a mass exodus of civilians immediately after the company (-) left. Co B (-) 1/69 Armor advanced toward the contact area and began receiving small arms fire less than half-way to the location where LT Webb's perimeter was being systematically eliminated. CPT Grogan requested clearance to return the fires, which was granted, silenced the resistance, and continued towards

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the pillar of rising smoke.

- i. Co C (-), 1/50 arrived at the location of the dismounted survivors only seconds before the enemy launched his final assault. Rapidly and effectively Co C formed a protective ring around the men, loaded up the wounded and evacuated them to the West. The timely relief cost Co C (-) dearly. Captain Copley, the CO, was among the 30 wounded from Co C (-) as the enemy fires rained in from both sides of his relief force. Meanwhile, Co B (-) 1/69 Armor continued to advance toward increasing resistance. Taking 9 casualties, the tankers fought in to join the Co C perimeter and together regrouped in a position where resupply and Dustoff were effected, and preparation for a counterattack were completed.
- j. At 1230 hours, CO, 1/50th Inf requested the release of Co B 1/50 which had been securing LZ English. Permission was granted, and Co B, 1/50th with 1 platoon from Co B 1/69 Armor arrived at LZ Ichiban at 1501 hours. The first mission of Co B was to assist in the extraction of the 2 mired tracks which Co B 1/69th Armor had left behind and had since come under an anti-tank and small arms attack. Co B detached one platoon to accomplish this mission and proceeded to the location where Co B 1/69th Armor and Co C (-) 1/50th were effecting resupply and preparing for the counter-attack. (See Sketch #2).
- k. At 1700 hours, Co B (-) 1/69th Armor, and Co B (-) 1/50th and Co C (-) 1/50th moved out in the counterattack. Air strikes adjusted by Captain Grogan had been applied continuously for several hours and were still arriving on station. Artillery engaged known enemy targets each time there was a slight lull in the bombing and strafing. The counterattack proceeded up to the position indicated on the sketch #2 where the infantry began taking excessive casualties from fires coming both from the East and West of their axis of advance. (See Sketch #2). The units drew back towards a night logger position for additional resupply. Before they reached the proposed location, 2 tanks became mired in the rice paddy which had been dry and hard only a short time before. Apparently, someone flooded the paddy deliberately or the bombs destroyed a dike, allowing the paddy to be flooded. In either case, the trafficability of the paddy was reduced significantly in two hours time.
- l. By the time the elements had secured a coil for resupply, it was nearly dark. At this point, the Chinook pilot at LZ Uplift refused to fly to the logger position, stating that the area was not secure

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and that he had to check through his chain of command before flying the resupply. After 30 minutes of communications, the pilot consented to fly, then again refused. At approximately 1900 hours, the decision was made to move the companies to LZ Salem for resupply, where the pilot consented to fly. Ammunition for the tanks and carriers was critically short. There was an immediate need for all types of ammunition. The duty officer, 173d Abn Brigade was notified of this battalion's intention to move to LZ Salem. Five sorties of CH-47 were flown to LZ Salem where the resupply stocks were secured.

- m. When there was one sortie remaining to be flown, S-3, 173d Brigade informed the Battalion that the elements would not withdraw as far back as LZ Salem, but would remain in their position. Some adjustment was made and the resupply aircraft were informed of the new landing zone location. On that note, both CH-47's departed station. One CH-47 returned to LZ Uplift at 2400 hours and flew the required resupply.
- n. At the logger site, personnel were still breaking down ammunition at 0330 hours when an enemy attack was initiated. (Sketch 3). Small arms, anti-tank and indirect weapons fire rained in from four directions. Reaction was instantaneous and fire superiority was gained within a minute. A ground attack coming from the Northwest was eliminated by small arms and tank cannister ammunition. At least 200 anti-tank and mortar rounds were fired at the logger position causing 3 KIA and 18 WIA. A stack of undistributed ammunition took a direct hit, burned and exploded for several hours. This contact was broken at approximately 0500 hours.
- o. The elements in the contact area were assigned the mission of again sweeping through the contact area, which they did for 2 days with no significant findings other than enemy dead. One NVA Chieu Hoi to Co B 1/50 at 0630 hours 7 May.
- p. The following is a breakdown of friendly and enemy losses (body count) for the contact:

	ENEMY	HC 1/50	Co A 1/50	Co B 1/50	Co G 1/50	Co B 1/69
KIA	117		11	3	2	2
WIA			26	26	30	9
CIA	1					
S/A	6	4	32		4	
C/S Wpns	7	2	17			
APC		1	4			

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12. Conclusions:

Interrogation of 1 Hoai Chanh revealed that 3 enemy battalions were located in a U-shaped ambush with the mission of destroying the battalion APC's. Five APC's were destroyed. Although there is no conclusive evidence, it is felt that the enemy allowed intelligence leaks concerning his location, to draw our elements into his prepared positions. That Co A (-) paused for a noon meal where it did was probably a fortunate turn of events. The main attack required the enemy to leave his prepared positions in order to assault the APC. The low readiness posture of Co A allowed the initial enemy attack to gain and maintain fire superiority. The supporting arms could not be brought to bear on the enemy for lack of radio communications.

13. Reporting Officer's Analysis:

- a. The Battle of An Bao marks the first time that a unit of this organization has been rendered combat ineffective. Had a reconnaissance element for Co A been utilized as it moved out on its assigned mission, events might have unfolded differently. Fifty personnel, distributed in 9 APC's is too small a force to maintain the fire power on the tracks and provide dismounted security. It is also felt to be significant that all but one of the relief units arrived on the scene in a reduced strength posture. Static security and other commitments allowed only Co B 1/50 to arrive intact. All others involved were minus at least one platoon.
- b. Resupply became a minor problem several times because of lack of transportation. Tank and mechanized units in contact expend ammunition in quantities which were beyond the expected levels. An experience factor has now been obtained and perhaps future resupply requirements will be better anticipated. Approximately 15 CH-47 sorties were required to support an effective force of 7 mechanized and 2 tank platoons.
- c. Perhaps the most outstanding support received during this contact was the MAC air support. The MAC aircraft remained on station constantly and airstrikes were nearly continuous. It is impossible to accurately measure their overall effect, but there can be no doubt that it was extremely significant.

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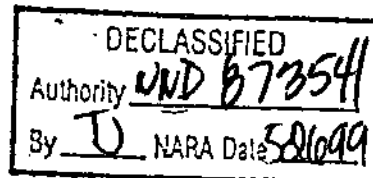
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Richard P Guthrie

RICHARD P GUTHRIE
CPT, Infantry
S-3 Air

- Incl:
- 1 - Lessons Learned Report
- 2 - Diagram
- 3 - Sketch 1
- 4 - Sketch 2
- 5 - Sketch 3

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Lessons Learned Report - Battle of An Bao 5 May 1968

1. Maximum use of all available fire support to include organic, supporting artillery and air should be used constantly. Air strikes and/or artillery should be used any time a body of 15 are actually seen, providing that support is available.
2. Visual Reconnaissance from the air is best effected by helicopters. Fixed wing aircraft do not provide effective V.R. 2 LOH might be held for the purpose of flying V.R. on request. The techniques should be tried.
3. We should train ourselves to show the restraint, self discipline, and patience which our enemies show. Precipitous actions cause casualties. Think, plan, and coordinate. Then, react deliberately.
4. Security elements should be dismounted from tracks during movement where visibility is limited. Each track should provide security at a meal halt; meals eaten on staggered time schedule. This is more time consuming, but much more secure.
5. When all weapons on ACAV APC are firing, it is extremely difficult to accurately fix the enemy fires. Tracks should regulate and alternate weapon fires. Additional training is needed in this area, for mechanized troops operating alone and when operating with tanks.
6. More deliberate actions should be conducted with tank forces so that the troops can learn the capabilities and limitations of each arm.
7. There were several examples of relatively low readiness posture. Local security is the implicit responsibility of all leaders. Apparently they have not been properly trained in this one area.
8. SUMMARY: No glaring errors in this contact are apparent, but the number of small errors was great:
 - a. Security was posted, but was inadequate.
 - b. Artillery reconnaissance by fire was conducted, but not fully exploited. Artillery was not effective once contact was made. When contact was made the Artillery F.O. apparently lost and never regained contact with the firing batteries.
 - c. Co C 1/50 was hurried to contact, arrived just in time, but was not briefed well enough to be able to assume a proper formation or react properly once contact was made.
 - d. There were many examples of hasty reaction to underdeveloped situations.

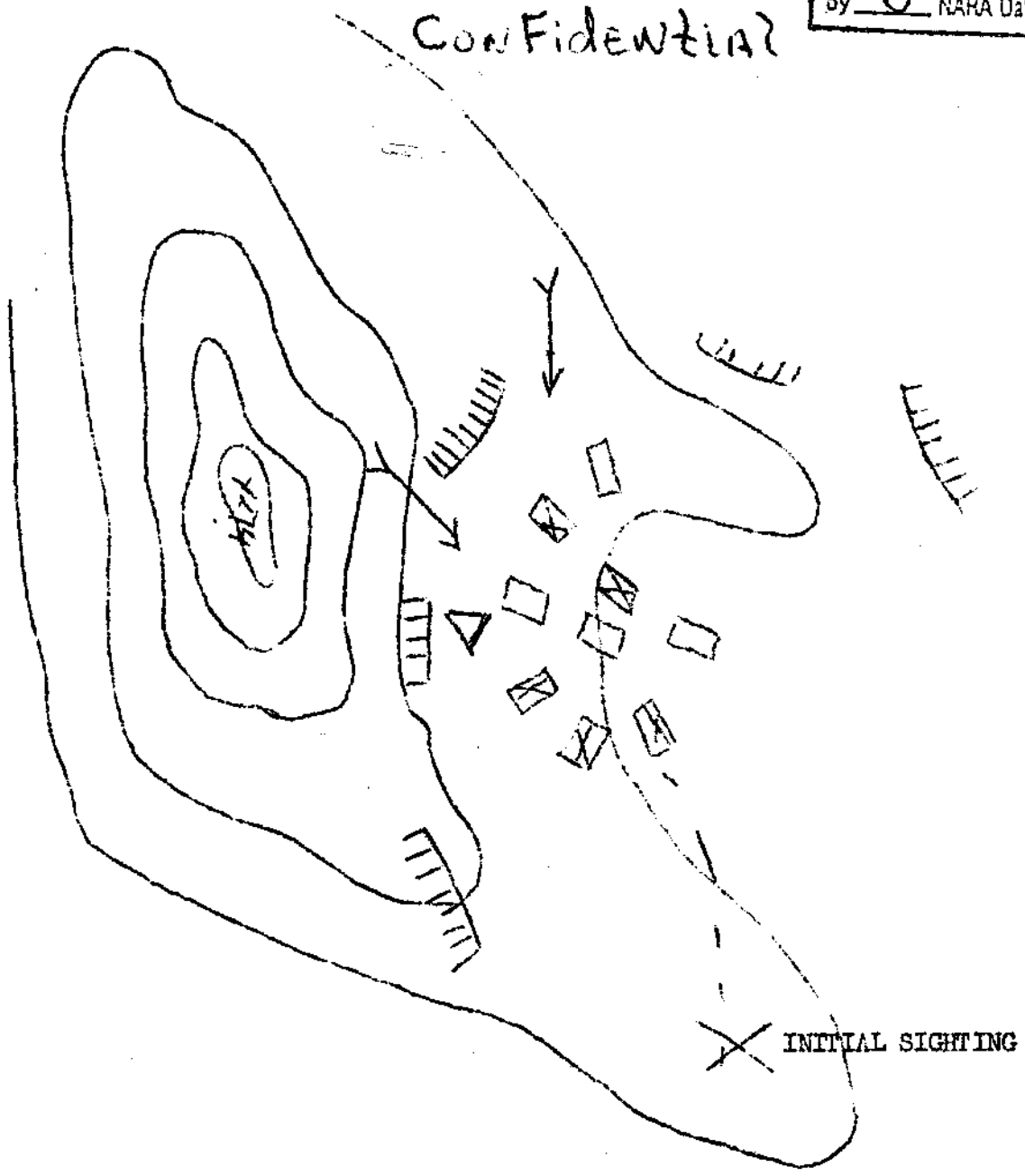
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DIAGRAM

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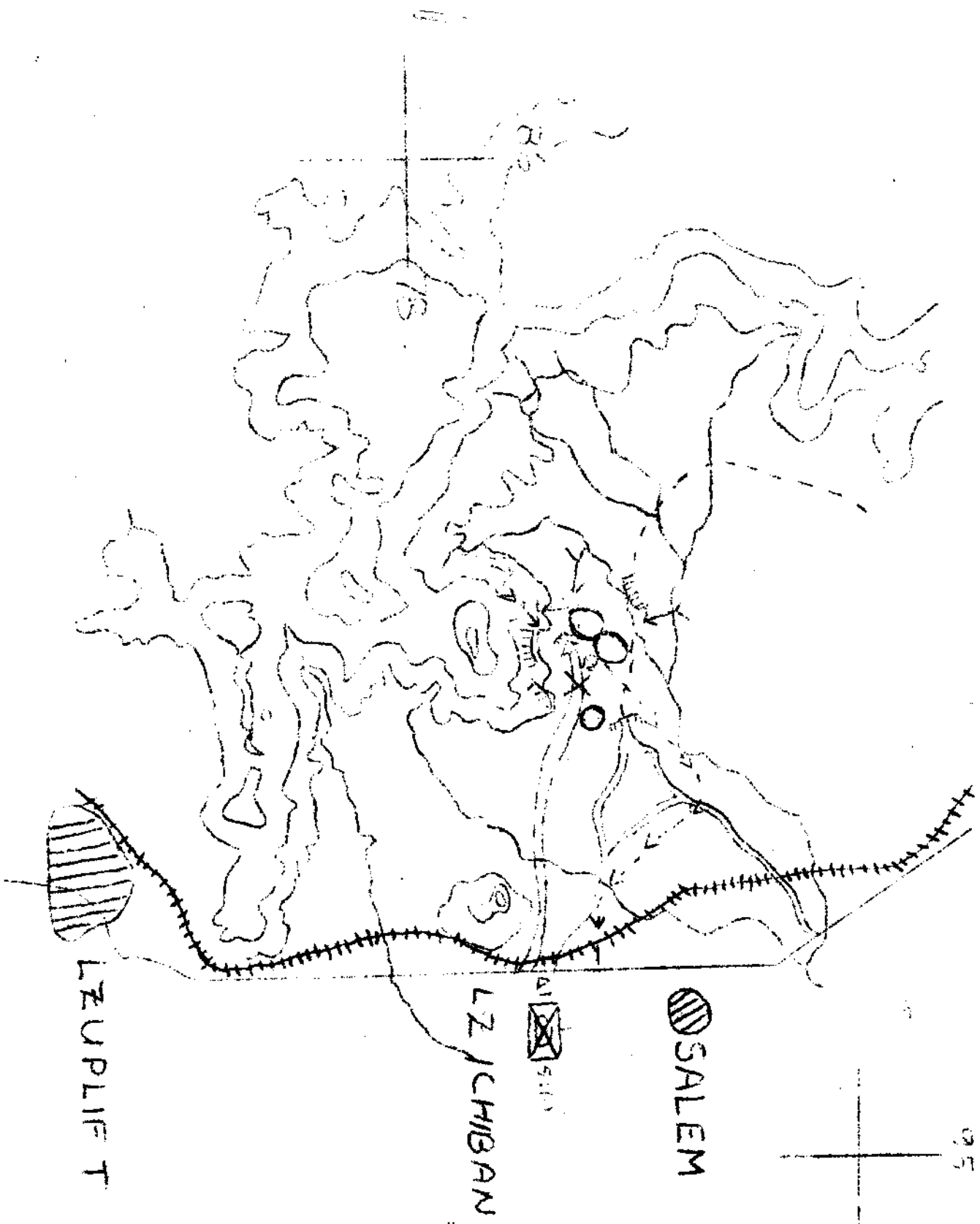
INITIAL SIGHTING

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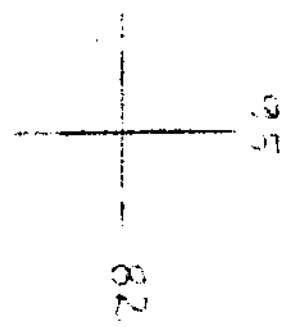
SKETCH #1



LZ UPLIFT

LZ CHIBAN

SALEM

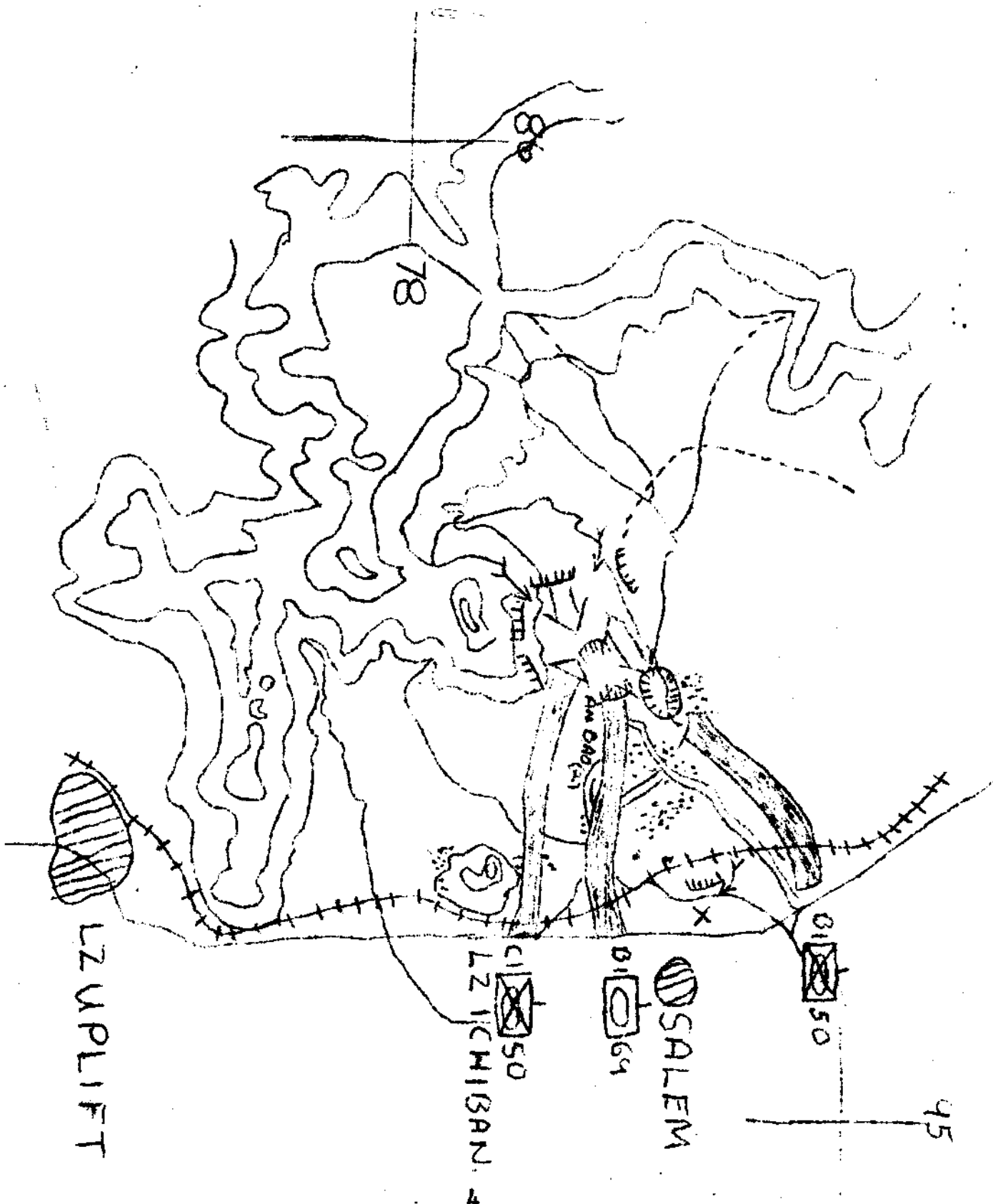


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SKETCH #2

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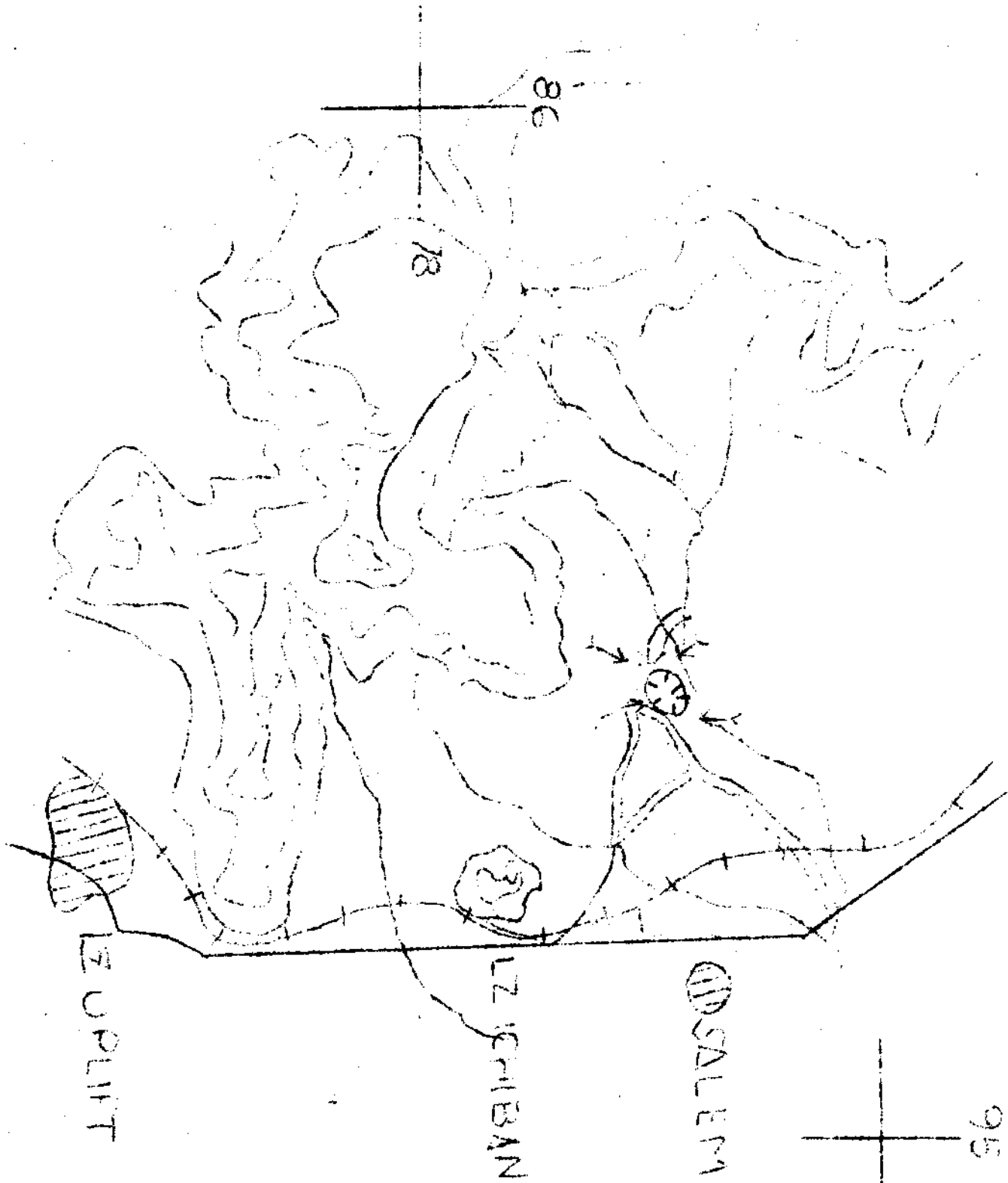


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SKETCH #3

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