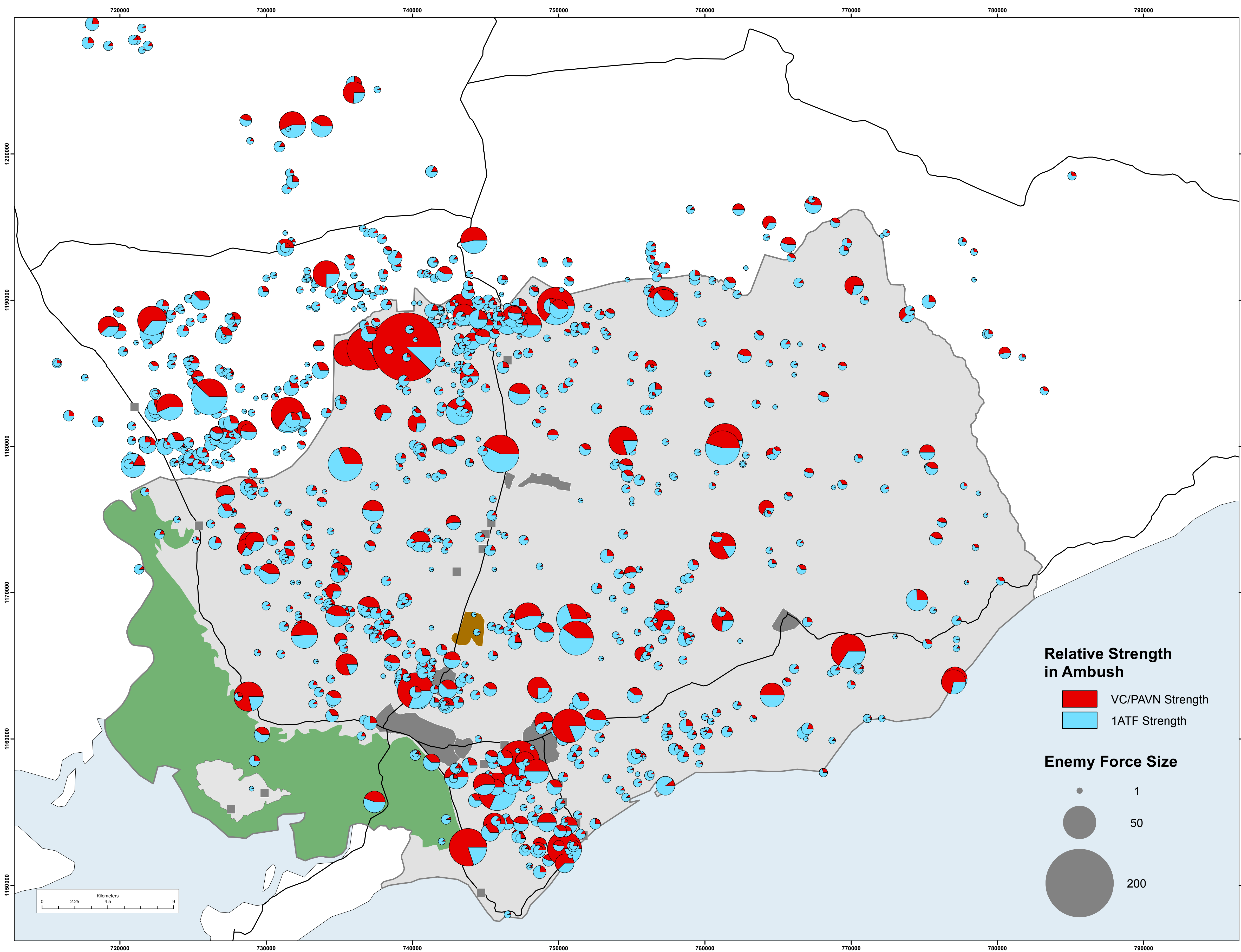


The Australian Counterinsurgency Campaign in the Vietnam War: The Ambush Battle

Map 1: Enemy Force Size and Relative Strength: 1ATF Ambushes of the Enemy



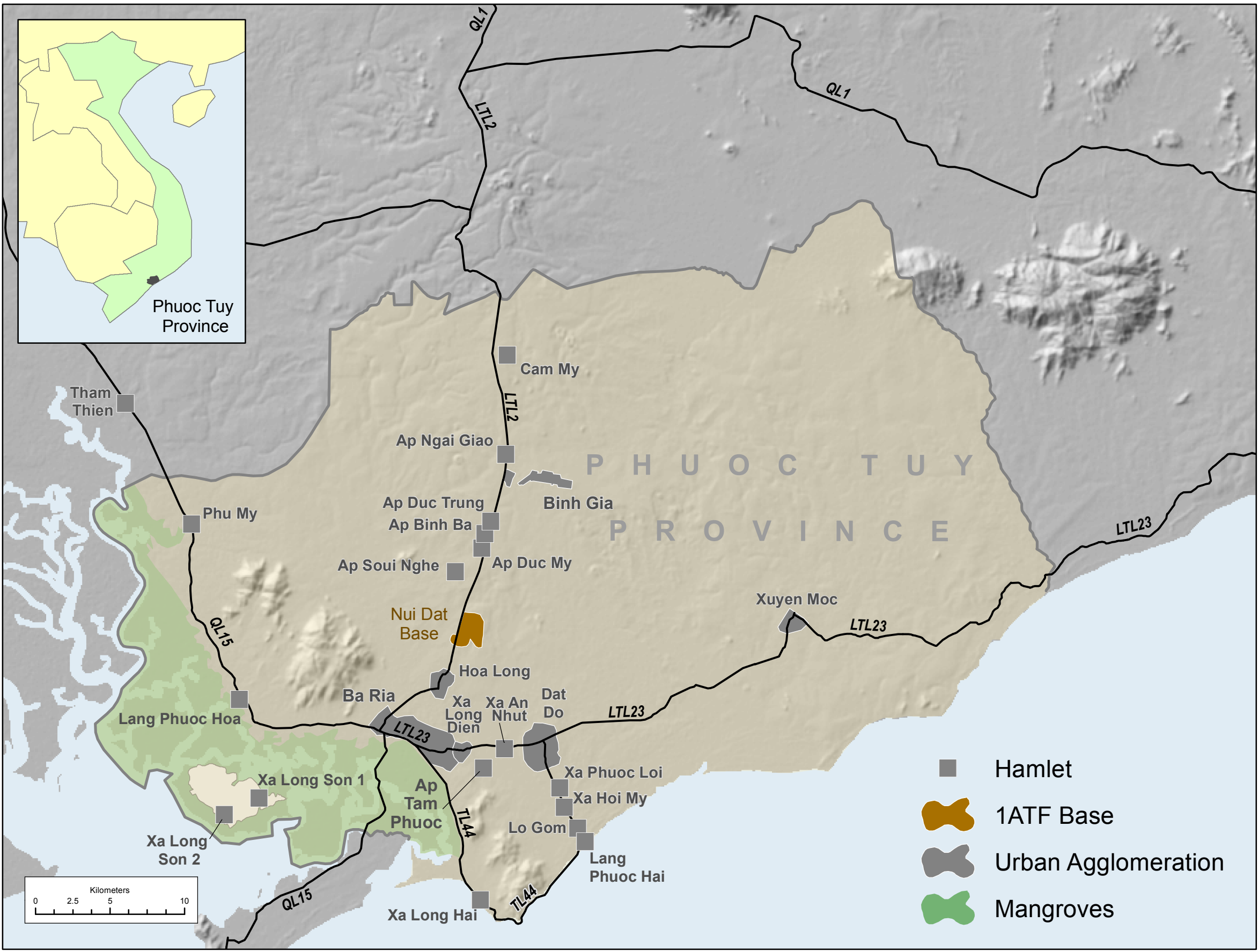
Our statistical analysis of the Vietnam Combat Database revealed that the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF) initiated 1,101 ambushes against the Viet Cong/People's Army of Vietnam (VC/PAVN). Relative strength of the forces involved can determine the effectiveness of ambushes. In most ambushes, 1ATF achieved a very favourable strength ratio (Map 1). Ambushes in which enemy strength approached or exceeded 1ATF strength tended to cluster around the villages of Hoa Long and Dat Do, and in the approaches to VC/PAVN base areas in the north and northwest of the province. Despite the fact that at some locations the VC/PAVN achieved numerical superiority, the 1ATF was usually able to achieve a favourable loss ratio (1 Australian casualty to 8.7 VC/PAVN casualties).

Where ambushes occurred was related to other events in the war, such as bunker system attacks. 1ATF bunker system attacks tended to occur in the remote, unpopulated, jungle-covered parts of the province away from settlements where the VC/PAVN could build and maintain their base camps with little fear of detection by Free World Forces (Map 2). These bunker systems housed a significant population of VC/PAVN soldiers requiring a substantial logistics effort to keep these forces fed. Often, when 1ATF patrols captured an enemy bunker system, several large food caches were found in the nearby jungle.

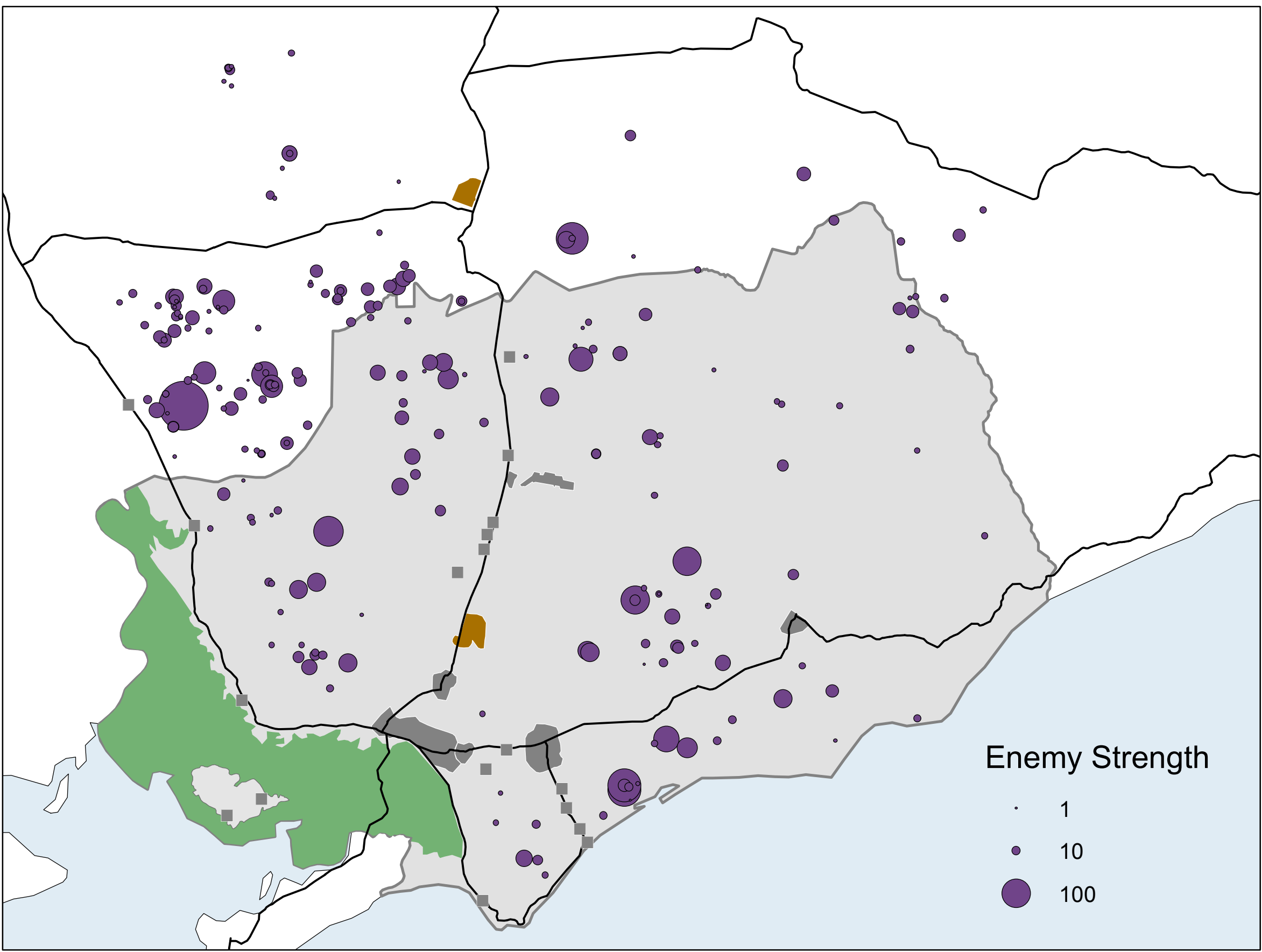
Over time, 1ATF had increasing success in capturing food from enemy caches. By 1969, 1ATF patrols had significantly reduced the VC/PAVN food reserves held in these caches. This faced the VC/PAVN with a series of choices. They could move major units out of Phuoc Tuy into neighbouring provinces where food supplies were easier to find. They could divert some of their combat manpower to food production such as hunting and collecting in the jungle. They could become more reliant on food provided direct from their supporters in the villages and hamlets of the province. In fact, they adopted all three measures. While the first two reduced their capacity for combat operations, the third led them into more frequent contact with the Australians, through 1ATF ambushes, as they attempted to enter villages to resupply with food.

The time sequence (Maps 3-8) demonstrates that the VC/PAVN attempted to enter and leave villages during the night when they had the best chance of being unobserved by 1ATF ambush patrols. The time sequence shows a rapid increase in the number of ambushes within 2.5km of a village after dusk, a lull in ambush activity around midnight as VC/PAVN patrols collect the food and prepare for their return journey, and a resumption of ambush activity before dawn as they leave the villages for the safety of the jungle.

Reference map



Map 2: 1ATF attacks on enemy bunker systems



Maps 3-8: 1ATF Ambushes Near Settlements According to Time of Day

