

November and U.S. artillery batteries provided liaison personnel to the fire direction centers of the three supporting Vietnamese artillery batteries. The effectiveness of the fire support co-ordination effort is evidenced by the successful integration of 2,096 tactical air sorties and 45 B-52 strikes during the operation. The battle of Dak To cost the enemy 1,644 lives and rendered three North Vietnamese Army infantry regiments ineffective, totally disrupting enemy plans for a major victory in the Central Highlands.

The holiday truce ended abruptly on New Year's Day 1968 for the defenders of Fire Support Base BURT, a 25th Infantry Division base located ten kilometers south of the Cambodian border. (Map 8) Beginning with sporadic mortar attacks in the late afternoon, the enemy sent four Viet Cong battalions against the base. Among the defenders were two batteries of 105-mm. and one battery of 155-mm. howitzers. The enemy ground attack commenced minutes before midnight, the official end of the truce. After a diversionary attack on the west side of the perimeter, defended by elements of the 2d Battalion, 22d Infantry (Mechanized), the enemy launched his main attack from the southeast, a sector defended by Company C, 3d Battalion, 22d Infantry, and Battery C, 2d Battalion, 77th Artillery. As the enemy slowly worked his way toward the bunker line, the artillery shifted from countermortar to direct fire in answer to a call from the infantry command post. Battery C began firing a heavy volume of direct fire with both high explosive and Beehive ammunition. The enemy attack slowed in the face of the artillery but picked up to the south of the fire support base, a sector manned by Company C, 2d Battalion, 22d Infantry, and Battery A, 2d Battalion, 77th Artillery. Battery A commenced direct fire, and flare ships and armed helicopters were used extensively throughout the south side of the base. Fire Support Base BEAUREGARD, located twelve kilometers to the west, provided supporting fire west of BURT in an attempt to prevent the enemy from reinforcing or withdrawing in that direction. The 155-mm. (self-propelled) howitzers of Battery C, 3d Battalion, 13th Artillery, located on the north side of the fire base, supplied continuous direct fire to the north, northeast, and northwest. In addition to the direct fire, indirect fire from both BURT and BEAUREGARD was shifted out to the road running south from BURT. Although they were not discovered until daylight, two enemy battalions were assembled on that road as a reserve force to exploit weaknesses in the perimeter. If weaknesses existed, the two battalions never found them. By 0300, tactical air had arrived and was pounding the area to the south. The fires of the artillery gunships and tactical air broke up the Viet Cong attack: by 0600 contact was broken and 400 enemy lay dead in and around the base.

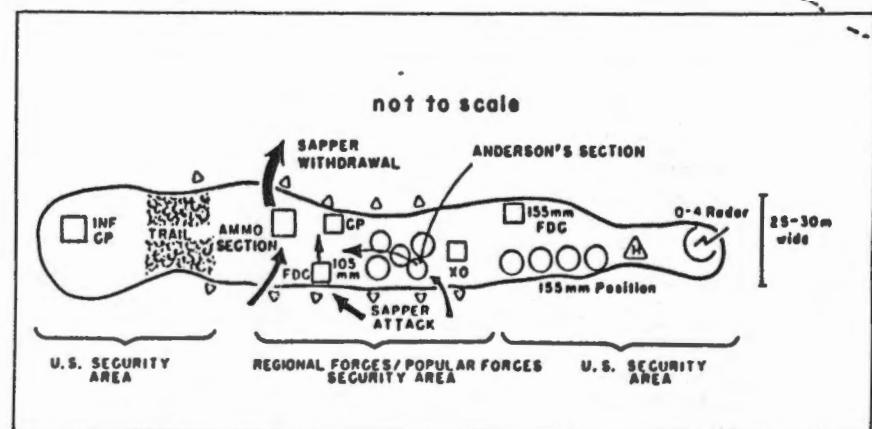


Diagram 7. Battery A, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 320th Artillery, fire base.

The artillerymen of the 25th Division played a vital role in the success of the operation. In addition to maintaining a constant stream of both direct and indirect fire, artillery personnel cut out hasty landing zones for resupply aircraft and broke out and distributed over 1,500 rounds of artillery and mortar ammunition and 200,000 rounds of small-arms ammunition, all during the hours of darkness and in the heat of battle. In addition, they established an improvised air station in the fire direction center of Battery C, 2d Battalion, 77th Artillery, and assisted in the treatment and evacuation of the wounded.

Despite the heroic actions of the 25th Division personnel, the battle cost 23 lives and 153 wounded. The successful integration of infantry, artillery, and air power had saved Fire Support Base BURT. The battle of Soui Cut is a typical example of many such actions that occurred during the war in Vietnam. It is representative of well co-ordinated position defense and fire support.

A second example of a determined defense by field artillerymen occupying a fire base occurred during the early morning hours of 14 October 1967. Battery A, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 320th Artillery (105-mm.), and Battery C, 3d Battalion, 16th Artillery (155-mm.), were occupying an unnamed fire base on a ridge line in support of elements of the 1st Battalion (Airborne), 327th Infantry, of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, during Operation WHEELER. The fire base, which had been occupied for almost a month, was located halfway between Tam Ky and Thien Phuoc in the I Corps region.