

S-3 JLN
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On 19 January 1970 a battle took place between Company C, 2d Battalion 35th Infantry, and an unknown size enemy force. As forward observer of B Battery, 2d Battalion 9th Artillery and attached to Company C, I have been asked to relate the circumstances surrounding the artillery's role in the engagement.

The engagement was initiated by the enemy around 1100 hours of that day. Company C was searching out a bunker complex when it began receiving small arms fire. Immediately upon contact I called the liaison officer of A Battery, 2-9th Arty, this being my only artillery communication. Once tactical clearance was given by the B Btty liaison shop, a battery began firing for me. The first few smoke rounds were unobserved. The foliage was dense and the din of battle completely masked the sound of smoke rounds. Simultaneous to my adjustment, Company D, 2d Battalion 35th Infantry was closing the hill of battle from the northeast. They began recon by fire, which, because of its ideal location, was subsequently used as blocking fires. Since I could not observe any rounds, I called for the same data as was being fired for Company D. I adjusted the rounds from that location. During the adjustment it was becoming obvious that Company C was becoming gun-target to the rounds. I decided to change batteries. Meanwhile my liaison officer was flying overhead, asking if I wanted to adjust B Battery. About this time we had gunships and a medevac come into the area. Artillery was given a temporary checkfire by Charlie Company commander until all birds had cleared the area. The ships worked the area over, but the enemy force remained strong. Once all ships had left the area fighting was renewed. I began adjusting B/2-9th Arty. With artillery only 150-200 meters from hitting the target, I gave a right 50, drop 50 correction, method of fire being battery three rounds. A cease-fire was given by the FDO of B Battery due to the closeness of friendlylies. Company D, 2d Battalion 35th Infantry, had been moving toward the area. They estimated the rounds to be 150-200 meters from their position. My correction would put the rounds 75 meters from their position, and would put them on gun-target line. Consequently the cease-fire was given. At that point I pleaded with everyone to let the rounds be fired. All higher artillery shops were made aware or should have been made aware of our situation. With artillery support we had an excellent chance of taking the bunker complex. Besides we still had

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three friendly KIA laying 30-60 meters in front of the line of battle. These bodies had to be retrieved. An order came out over the radio to pick another target. I explained that my target was before me, and didn't need to fire on another target. I refused to fire on another target. A few minutes later another direct order came down, this time from another source. I argued to no avail, knowing that the only target to be fired was the enemy bunkers. I picked another target, Meanwhile the infantry, not having artillery support where it was needed, initiated a drive to recover the KIA's while they were retrieving the bodies. Liaison stated they could fire a smoke round, then fire a high explosive round to see if it was safe with Company D. At this point the unit was retrieving the KIA's and was taking fire. To begin adjusting the rounds in while all were exposed would endanger more friendlies. The original concept was to put the artillery on the bunkers then send the force out to take the bunkers and recover the KIA's. The bodies were recovered, two men being lightly wounded in the action. When we had fallen back and were preparing to move back to our night location, permission was granted to fire my last corrections. I adjusted on the bunker complex and we moved out. I continued to adjust on the complex the better part of the evening and during the night fire program. Early the next morning, the following day, the area was swept. The enemy force had vacated the area.

My contention is that some kind of decision should have been made to allow us to fire on the bunker complex prior to letting the infantry move back into the contact zone. More lives could have been lost, trying to take the bunkers and trying to retrieve the bodies.

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