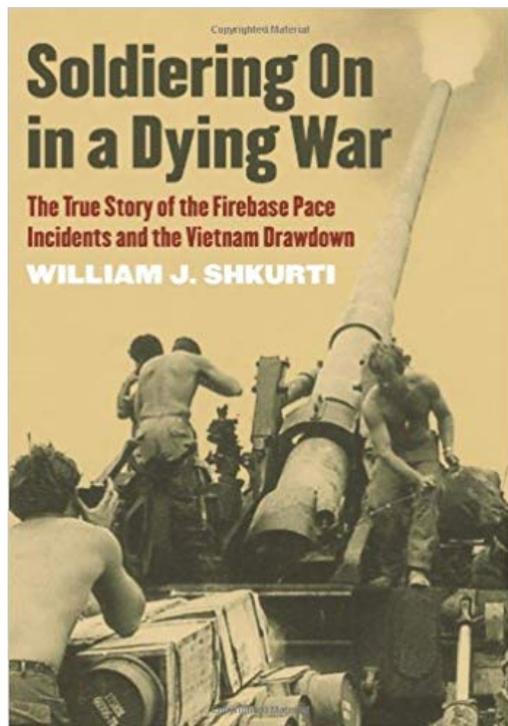


# Soldiering On in a Dying War: The True Story of the Firebase Pace Incidents and the Vietnam Drawdown (Modern War Studies) by William J. Shkurti



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By the autumn of 1971 a war-weary American public had endured a steady stream of bad news about the conduct of its soldiers in Vietnam. It included reports of fraggings, massacres, and cover-ups, mutinies, increased racial tensions, and soaring drug abuse. Then six soldiers at Fire Support Base Pace, a besieged U.S. artillery outpost near the Cambodian border, balked at an order to conduct a nighttime ambush patrol. Four days later, twenty soldiers from a second unit objected to patrolling even in daylight. The sensation these events triggered in the media, along with calls for a congressional investigation, reinforced for the American public the image of a dysfunctional military on the edge of collapse. For a time Pace became the face of all that was wrong with American troops during the extended withdrawal from Vietnam. William Shkurti, however, argues that the incidents at Firebase Pace have been misunderstood for four decades. Shkurti, who served as an artillery officer not far from Pace, uses declassified reports, first-person interviews, and other sources to reveal that these incidents were only temporary disputes involving veteran soldiers exercising common sense. Shkurti also uses the Pace incidents to bring an entire war and our withdrawal from it into much sharper focus. He reevaluates the performance and motivation of U.S. ground troops and their commanders during this period, as well as that of their South Vietnamese allies and North Vietnamese adversaries; reassesses the media and its coverage of this phase of the war; and shows how some historians have helped foster misguided notions about what actually happened at Pace. By taking a closer look at what we thought we knew, Shkurti persuasively demonstrates how combat units still in harm's way adapted to the challenges before them and soldiered on in a war everyone else wanted to be over. In doing so, he also suggests a context to better understand the challenges that may lie ahead in the drawdown of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan.



## **Reviews of the [Soldiering On in a Dying War: The True Story of the Firebase Pace Incidents and the Vietnam Drawdown \(Modern War Studies\)](#) by William J. Shkurti**

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Mr. Shkurti's book is a jewel and one that I wish more historians would write about. Specifically, the trials and tribulations of those of us who served in Vietnam between 1969 and 1973. Not only was the country singularly disinterested in the dangers that you faced on a minute-to-minute basis, but you were required to do much the same workload with fewer and fewer people to share the work. People don't seem to understand just how draining combat can be (or the imminent threat of combat) on the mind, body and soul. Sometimes you just get so damn tired you can't move and some REMF officer decides that you need to go on some stupid, high-risk mission or patrol that makes no sense whatsoever. Mr. Shkurti has captured the essence of that status and explained how, there were times, when you questioned the need for the stupid, risky patrol. And how the heroic fellow soldiers at FSB Pace were simply questioning the efficacy of a last-minute, ill-conceived patrol or ambush that put YOUR life at risk while the REMF officer trundled off to his nice warm bed to a sound night's sleep. Mr. Shkurti explains that is exactly what was going on at FSB Pace and that some damned reporter with an agenda happened to be there when the decision was questioned.

I did my time up in I Corps, where we might have had the name of what we did changed for political expediency, but it still felt a whole lot like combat. Truly, more and more of the combat duties were passed off to the ARVN. However, someone still had to protect the Air Force installations, the medical installations and the support operations of the Army. That fell to us. You can't protect something without conducting aggressive operations to find out what you are up against. And do so with fewer and fewer resources to conduct these "defensive" operations. Mr. Shkurti explains that in this book in a simple to understand manner. At the same time, he exculpates the heroes of FSB Pace who were cruelly maligned by some in the press and taken up by those with an agenda who were determined to interpret every occurrence that was even the slightest bit out of their preconceived but ill-informed view of "ordinary events" as a political statement.

If you are a student of military history or the history of the Vietnam War or just want to read a damned good book about real events and real people doing extraordinary things in a very difficult time under very trying circumstances, get this book. You won't be disappointed.

Fearlessrunner

This book turned out to be a pleasant surprise, with emphasis on "pleasant" and less so on "surprise." I ordered it from Amazon on the strength of the back cover blurbs, two of which were written by personal acquaintances who are Vietnam War scholars. The author's own personal connection to the events he writes about also interested me. The actual incident (there were several in fact) at FB Pace seems to have been blown out of proportion by French news agencies, but -

rather surprisingly - not by US media outlets. The book is divided into the following sections: Part One: The Siege (this is where the actual combat operations at FB Pace are discussed), Part Two: The Soldiers (a survey of the US Army in VN during 1971 and not necessarily the soldiers at FB Pace); Part Three: The Press (an objective look at the media which should put to rest the perception that all reporters were out to "get" the US Army) and Part Four: The Bigger Picture (where the author adds additional context by examining our enemies and allies). In short, the author addresses two major topics in this book: the misrepresented incident of "combat refusals" at FB Pace (an account written and championed ever since by one independent journalist) and the post-war stereotyping of the US Army in the latter stages of the American drawdown in Vietnam by academics and Hollywood. Highly recommended to serious students of the Vietnam conflict. William J. Shkurti has taken great care to get this story right and it shows.

Arashigore

As a participant in the events at Fire Support Base Pace, I had given up on the truth ever coming to light. The politicization of war that was prevalent at the time, none of the media accounts, the subsequent articles, and books published about FSB Pace have been so misleading and inaccurate as to distort the actual events in a way that conformed to their preconceived political views rather than presenting the facts so the reader could draw their own conclusions. As the replacement XO (Executive Officer), I can personally attest to the accuracy of the details of events I was directly involved in and, those that I was not directly involved with correlate to what others had direct knowledge of related to me. It is evident that Mr. Shkurti invested a lot of time and effort to obtain first hand accounts, collaborated those accounts with others that had first hand knowledge, and the source documents that were available. I am grateful to him for the results of his hard work and commitment to recording the truth without a personal or political slant. I hope this book can become the "lessons learned" text I believe he intended it to be so that students of history and future policy makers will not let the sacrifices and valor demonstrated at Pace be in vain. I was proud of the men that I commanded and believe most (not all) of the higher ranking officers acted with integrity. so, for those readers that are looking for well researched truth presented in a very readable and clear way about the details and implications of a pivotal small unit battle in RVN, I believe you will find it difficult to find a better book to read.

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Soldiering On is an important work in the often overheated literature emerging from the Vietnam War. As a Special Forces officer on the ground during the period covered - the deadly tail end of an unpopular and largely misunderstood war - it was highly interesting to see the extensive research and documentation done to bust many of the popular often hyperbolic myths about Vietnam and the Soldiers who fought there.

As recounted in a very fast, highly readable style suitable for a civilian audience as well as military readers, the author dismisses the canard that all of us were drug-addled, alcoholic, sociopaths in an undisciplined and ineffective Army.

It was a tough time to be sure, but then no one ever was invited to a war expecting a picnic. As always the American Soldier rose to the challenge.

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