



# **Soldiering On in a Dying War: The True Story of the Firebase Pace Incidents and the Vietnam Drawdown (Modern War Studies)**

*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.

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