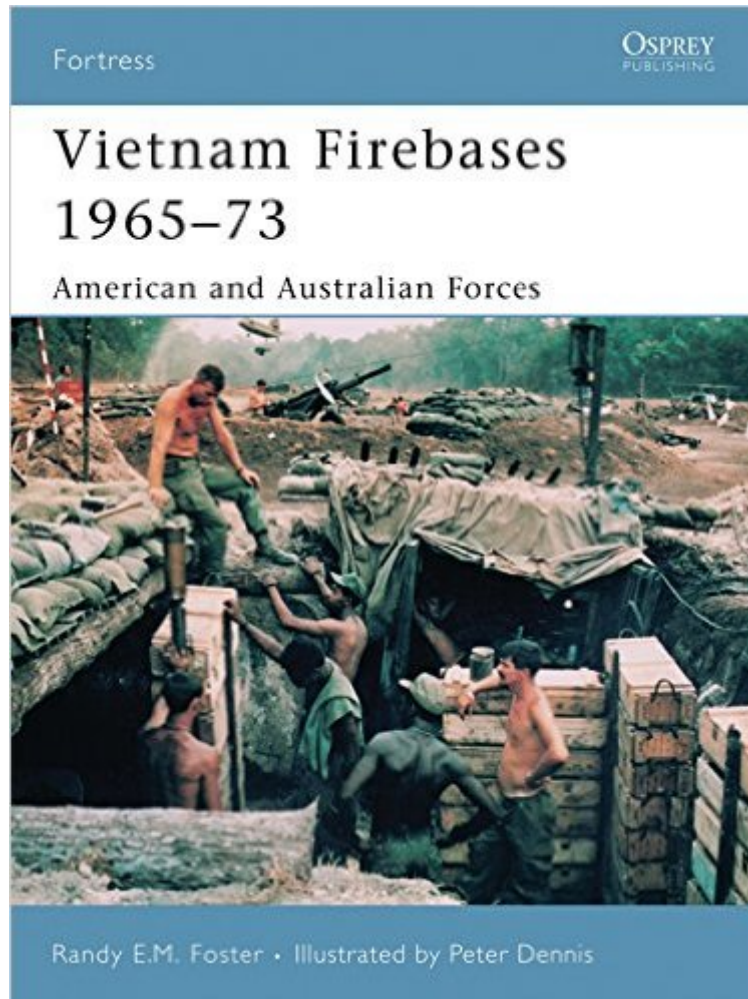


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Vietnam Firebases 1965-73: American And Australian Forces (Fortress)



Synopsis

Impressive in terms of scale and structure, the Fire Support Base became a dominant element in ground maneuver during the Vietnam War. Initially a mobile base, it soon evolved into a semi-permanent and more sophisticated fortress as a result of enemy counterattacks and bombardments. As a consequence, the majority of US and other allied troops found themselves pinned down in defensive or support roles, rather than being free to conduct 'search and destroy' or other mobile missions. Thus, the first and foremost function of the Fire Support Base was defensive. Troops, machine guns, mortars, artillery, surveillance radars, and command centers all had to be dug into bunkers and fire trenches by nightfall of the first day. Around these positions there would be deep belts of barbed wire, generously scattered with several different types of mines and even, in a few cases after 1967, with a brand new series of electronic sensors to detect and locate the enemy at a distance. With the benefit of the on-site howitzers, the FSB could also deliver offensive high volume fire, reaching as far as 14,600m and eliminating enemy firing sites, supporting friendly infantry operations, or simply participating in fire missions where exact targets were not known. In fact, the fort offered such a degree of support and protection that ground maneuver was eventually hampered by the troop's reluctance to leave the comfort and safety of the FSB. With a description of the design, development and operational history of the Fire Support Base, this book provides the key to understanding one of the main assets of US battle strategy in the Vietnam War.

Book Information

Series: Fortress (Book 58)

Paperback: 64 pages

Publisher: Osprey Publishing (January 30, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1846031036

ISBN-13: 978-1846031038

Product Dimensions: 7.2 x 0.2 x 9.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (21 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #544,891 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #243 in [Books > History >](#)

[Australia & Oceania > Australia & New Zealand](#) #942 in [Books > History > Military > United](#)

[States > Vietnam War](#) #5700 in [Books > History > Asia](#)

Customer Reviews

I was at and opened FSB Concord located about 1 mile north of the Beinh Hoa Air base about 3 miles from Saigon. I was with the 199th Light Infantry Brigade, 2nd / 40th Artillery. I was with that Bn's S3 Section and spent time with all our units Batteries, BN's and Brigades TOCs. I found this book very truthful. I was there from Oct. 67 till Oct 68. Mostly around the Saigon Area, but not in Saigon. We weren't allowed to stop in Saigon even though we were protecting it. I was drafted and in that year I went from E-3 to E-5. I would have been made E-6 but as a draftee I wasn't that thrilled about Army life and I wanted to die of old age. Unfortunately, tens of thousands were never given that chance given that chance. The one thing that I noticed was the difference between being in the North of South Vietnam and being in the South of the same place. I was there during TET of 68 at a 3 gun Battery located at our Brig. Main base located next to II FIELD FORCE HQ. That night our small battery fired close to 800 rds. I was with HQ's FDC. Our gun bunnies (I use this term with great respect) did an outstanding job under some very difficult situations. They were able to fire up to 4 different missions at the same time in support of our defense. This was done with only 3 tubes. They also displaced one tube to fire beehive rds. They did that 3 times. This took place over 6 hrs. of non stop action.. Our only mishap was the destruction of a General's out house by one of our Illumination rounds empty casings. Illum. rds are base ejected and the thin casing that held the flare falls to earth while the flare floats and illuminates the surrounding area as it burns out and floats to earth. The General was upset and investigated, by survey, who fired the round.

Something that's been a slow growing fascination with me is the Vietnam War. Something from my youth where I can remember watching on the nightly news seeing the actions of the day. Over the years I've read various pieces, mainly focusing on Rolling Thunder (love the F-105 Thunderchief) with the occasional dabble into the land campaign (loved Brennan's War, 5 stars!). When I was in a hobbyshop and looking around I saw this Osprey book on Vietnam Firebases and decided to pick it up to expand my knowledge a little. This is your stereo-typical Osprey book, this time following their fortress format, something I haven't really delved into prior to this. Formatting is similar to other Osprey offerings; Introduction, About the Subject, an Action, and Aftermath, with a slight modification of Touring and Life at a firebase. This is a nice simple book, direct with a good level of details for Osprey. The actions described (Firebase Bird and Firebase Crook) are interesting because they're almost diametrically opposite (FB Bird was almost overrun while Crook was never threatened as much). Normal operations are covered in Life in a Firebase. Given the normal scope and writings of Osprey books this one is a standout. I'm calling it 5 stars because it expanded my knowledge on Vietnam era firebases and did it with a surprising level of detail.

Vietnam Firebases 1965-73: American and Australian Forces by Randy Foster and illustrated by Peter Dennis

The author's first task is to define for us just exactly what is a Firebase...the answer is somewhat difficult to pin down because of the rapid build up of US forces starting in 1965 that led to multiple tasks for troop locations in a quickly evolving war zone. The author's provide a helpful chart listing all the types of US military installation with a short definition of each one. As expected there is some overlap in the types of bases between say a LZ (landing zone) and a Special Forces Camp.

My distillation of the author's information is as follows: A Firebase is a reinforced, protected military position, semi-permanent in construction, with a significant contingent of artillery, a landing zone for helicopters, used primarily to support convoys and ground troops with intense directed fire. I would add to this that the bases were also used to draw out the enemy for engagements. It would seem that with its awesome fire power the NVA/VC would avoid attacking these bases with just mortars, sappers and then "human waves" of infantry but that was not the case. In the bizarre geopolitical calculations employed by the North Vietnam leadership their troops were expendable. Uncle Ho and his war planners knew that by attacking a well-fortified base and inflicting casualties the result would be negative publicity in the US and a corresponding political advantage for them. These 'suicidal' attacks were not isolated occurrences as the authors point out with several examples.

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