

Fire Bases

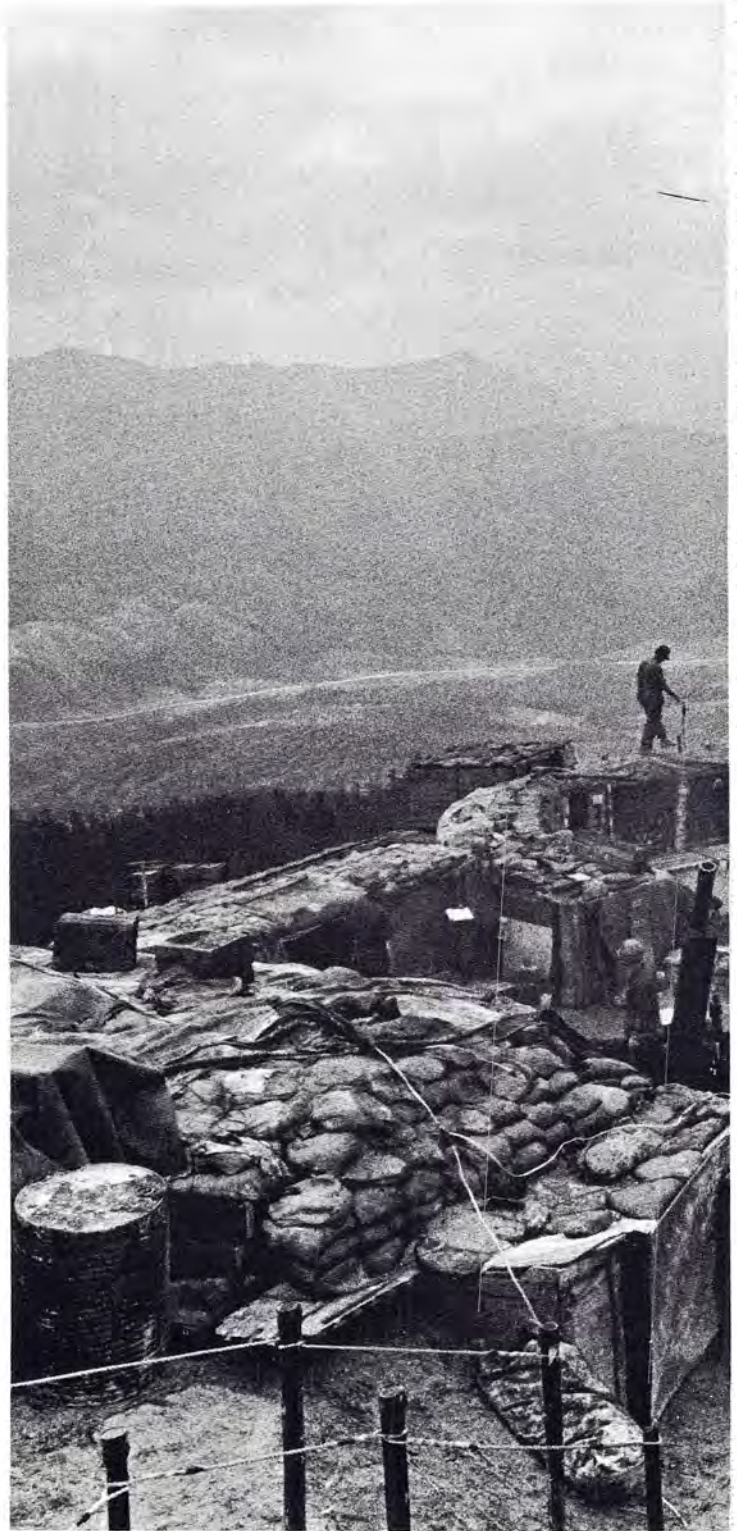
The bulk of GIs who aren't grunts and aren't at the Rear spend their year on a *fire support base*. Hundreds of fire bases exist in Vietnam, enabling the U.S. to blanket almost every foot of the country with artillery fire.

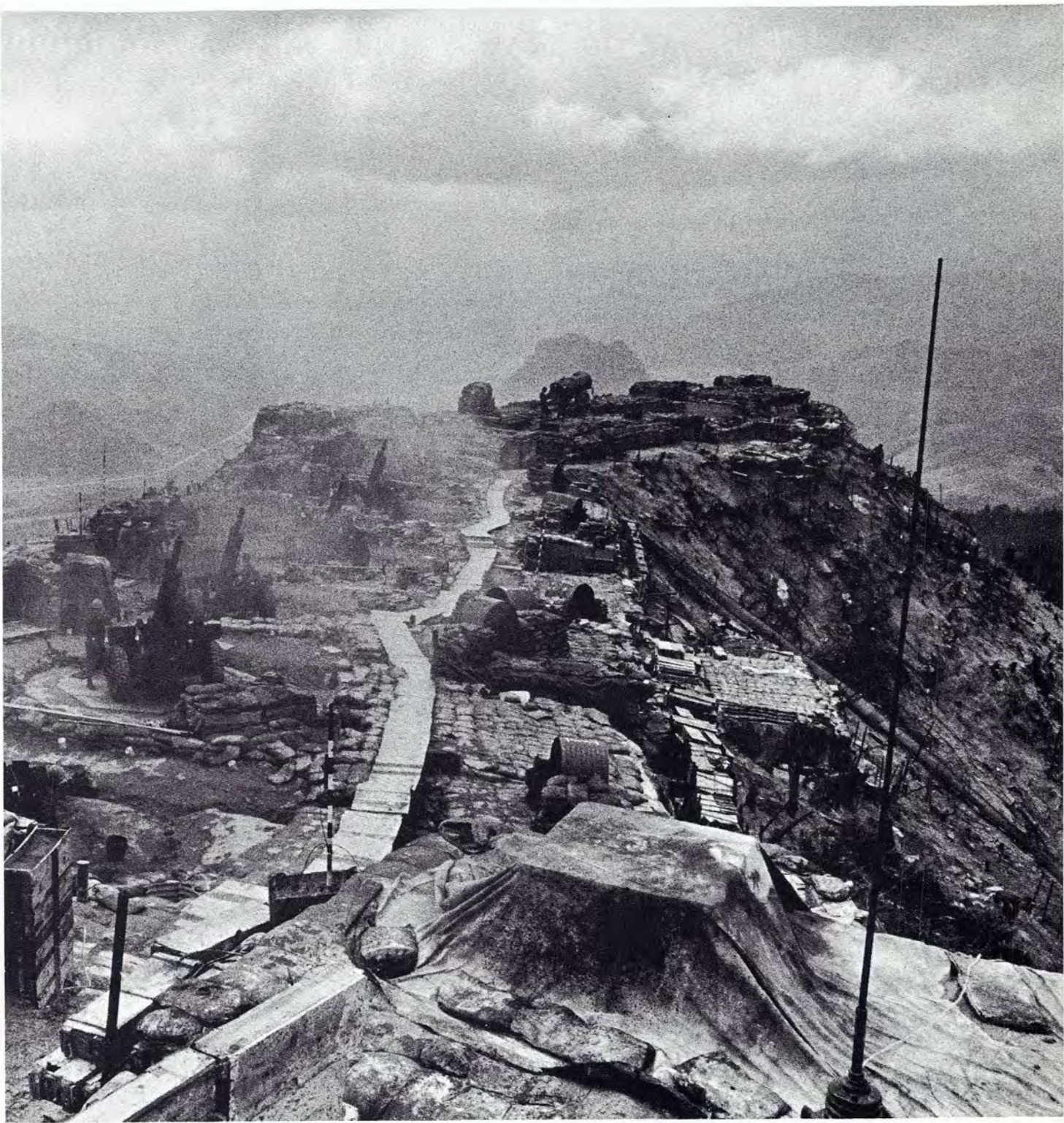
At the fire bases, the GIs don't go through hell or face death like the grunts, and they're usually exempt from the petty harassment of the Rear. For them, the overriding problem is boredom. For one year they sit on a little hunk of dust or mud, cleaning their artillery pieces, reading, writing letters home, and waiting for the signal, "Fire mission!" at which they leap into action.

Under the boredom, however, is a pervading apprehension that their base might be fire-base-of-the-week-that's-overrun. Periodically one of the outposts comes under enemy attack, and although it is well fortified, often the NVA break through the perimeter and overrun the base.

Fire Support Base Fuller

Fire Support Base Fuller was the northernmost U. S. base in Vietnam. Overlooking the DMZ, it perched atop a pile of rocks, 1,800 feet high, and only thirty-five yards at the widest spot. Fuller was supplied only by air, and at times it was fogged in for a week or more, so the small group stationed there became a real family. Across from Fuller is another pile of rocks where the Marines had a well-publicized combat base known as "the Rock Pile." The Marines are gone now, and their bases have been abandoned—Dong Ha, Vandergrift, Con Thien, Khe Sanh. No heroics for the draftees left behind to man the artillery in support of the Vietnamese. All they want to do is put in a year and get on board their "freedom bird."







THOUGHT FOR THE DAY: *There are some defeats more triumphant than victories.—Montaigne*
U.S. Army Vietnam Daily Bulletin,
March 27, 1970



The most exciting thing that had happened at Fuller in months was the sick baby ocelot that wandered into the base. The men were keeping it in the communication shack, the warmest spot on the base, and treating it with milk of magnesia and pencillin shots.

The main activity is polishing and repolishing brass shell casings for hours until they glisten—then using them as souvenir ashtrays. Once a month one of the GIs takes all the finished ashtrays back to Dong Ha to get them engraved. This GI put a “freedom bird” on his ashtray.

