



# Valley Of Death: The Tragedy At Dien Bien Phu That Led America Into The Vietnam War

*Ted Morgan*

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## Valley Of Death: The Tragedy At Dien Bien Phu That Led America Into The Vietnam War Ted Morgan

Pulitzer Prize-winning author Ted Morgan has now written a rich and definitive account of the fateful battle that ended French rule in Indochina—and led inexorably to America's Vietnam War. Dien Bien Phu was a remote valley on the border of Laos along a simple rural trade route. But it would also be where a great European power fell to an underestimated insurgent army and lost control of a crucial colony. **Valley of Death** is the untold story of the 1954 battle that, in six weeks, changed the course of history.

A veteran of the French Army, Ted Morgan has made use of exclusive firsthand reports to create the most complete and dramatic telling of the conflict ever written. Here is the history of the Vietminh liberation movement's rebellion against French occupation after World War II and its growth as an adversary, eventually backed by Communist China. Here too is the ill-fated French plan to build a base in Dien Bien Phu and draw the Vietminh into a debilitating defeat—which instead led to the Europeans being encircled in the surrounding hills, besieged by heavy artillery, overrun, and defeated.

Making expert use of recently unearthed or released information, Morgan reveals the inner workings of the American effort to aid France, with Eisenhower secretly disdainful of the French effort and prophetically worried that “no military victory was possible in that type of theater.” Morgan paints indelible portraits of all the major players, from Henri Navarre, head of the French Union forces, a rigid professional unprepared for an enemy fortified by rice carried on bicycles, to his commander, General Christian de Castries, a privileged, miscast cavalry officer, and General Vo Nguyen Giap, a master of guerrilla warfare working out of a one-room hut on the side of a hill. Most devastatingly, Morgan sets the stage for the Vietnam quagmire that was to come.

Superbly researched and powerfully written, **Valley of Death** is the crowning achievement of an author whose work has always been as compulsively readable as it is important.

## Valley Of Death: The Tragedy At Dien Bien Phu That Led America Into The Vietnam War Details

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## **From Reader Review Valley Of Death: The Tragedy At Dien Bien Phu That Led America Into The Vietnam War for online ebook**

### **Vinh Dang says**

excellent.

a history book is written in a way of a novel.  
Dien Bien Phu from different perspectives.

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### **Phil Deschler says**

Excellent book on the history of the battle of Dien Bien Phu along with the political history taking place while the battle was being fought. He starts with the history of Indochina from the start of WW 2. You get a clear picture in detail of the battle. You feel craziness of the political scene while men were dying and wounded at Dien Bien Phu. It seems at that time in history that the political haggling was as much part of battle as the actual fighting. People used the battle to improve their position at the talks for peace. Men were dying and lying wounded while politicians were more worried about their influence and power.

He is very clear and detailed about what took place from 1940 through 1954. It was a ugly time for France as they tried to hang onto Indochina. Two words come to mine that hung over this time; colonialism and communism. France trying to hang onto their colonial lands and the fear of Communism especially in the United States.

You get a clear idea how what happened in 1954 set up the US to enter Vietnam in the 60's.

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### **Doug says**

Marvelous detail of the battle, the background, and the diplomatic struggles going on at the same time. It is clear now to me now why the U.S. felt it was necessary to send troops to Indochina.

The stories of the battle are vivid and full of heroism in a futile and politically mismanaged struggle.

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### **Dave says**

I've read a number of books on this part of history regarding the French in Indochina in the 19th and 20th centuries. This is by far the best retelling of this particular battle, it explains the unique political and military significance of what, in the grand scheme of things, was a minor battle. The Machiavellian political backstabbing that went on is of an epic scale and the author manages to encompass the huge transfer of world power that occurred with regard European diminished hegemony post WW2.

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## **Randhir says**

Ted Morgan may have just written the last word on this epic battle which signalled the end of French colonialism in SE Asia. The Author has examined hitherto classified documents and studied the Battle on a larger canvas. While he has gone into the Battle itself in some detail, he has also examined the backdrop of power politics played out in France, US, UK and China, which ultimately led to the doom of the French forces and the creation of an independent Vietnam. There are fascinating insights. The nadir of French patriotism, where large sections of the population and parliament actively lobbied against the Colonial effort; the character qualities of Ho Chi Minh; the complete ambivalence in America and the determination of the Chinese is aptly brought out. In Vietnam itself, Gen Navarre, the overall commander stepped into the larger shoes of his predecessor and read his strategy wrong. In America, Eisenhower's ambivalence, reflected by the US Congress spelt doom to any active engagement in Vietnam despite the persistence of Dulles, the Secretary of State, who constantly tried for a united coalition. The marked reluctance of Eden, the British Foreign Minister, standing powerful in view of Churchill's failing health put paid to any unity. The Russians actively stonewalled all American effort to find a solution. The Chinese helped the Vietnamese unflinchingly and contributed largely to the successful strategy. Ho faced many humiliations while continuously strived for freedom while Giap emerged out of the shadow of his Chinese mentors and orchestrated a remarkable victory. The French while deciding to fight completely underestimated the logistic ability of the Vietnamese and the effect of their artillery so that Dien Bien Phu got isolated despite heroic efforts by paratroops. The overall commander, a tankman, was out of his depth, while the elite French troops fought and died in bitter battles against overwhelming odds. The treatment of the Prisoners of War will remain a blot on Vietnamese history. 70% seem to have perished.

There are lessons still to be drawn. First the inability of US to read the People's War haunts them still. Second, their belief in the Domino Theory led them into the failure of the Vietnam War. They constantly talked of intervention. All bluster as the present situation in Syria is reflecting. Also UK and US were at daggers drawn then, coaxed up in Iraq and now again face a divergence in their thinking. History inexorably repeats itself if not learnt.

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## **Savio says**

The author has done a good job devoting a substantial part of the book describing the political storm that is brewing behind the scenes, and not just in the Indochina region, but also thousands of miles away in Europe. Every battle is just the symptom of broader political turmoil and conflict.

The book offers a good description of the post-WWII political landscape in Europe: how the French is severely weakened but struggled to hold on to its colonial crown jewels in Asia, Russia is determined to stop Germany from rearmament and has a stake in the European EDC negotiations - thus does not want to upset the French too much, all the while Russia has vested interest in incubating communists regimes in Asia, and how the British seem to be fence-sitting while not without their own problems in Malaysia. This situation, combined with the rising anti-colonialism in SE Asia, the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek and formation of the People's Republic of China, offered the ingredients of the Vietminh's determination for independence.

The book also revealed how the US (from FDR to Eisenhower later) never did care about "democracy" in Vietnam, and actively tried to undermine the Vietminh (even though they were THE popularist movement among the Vietnamese) just because they were communist-leaning. Cold War politics was all about ideological struggle and sometimes the people's will were trampled. The US only fear that if the French fell,

Vietnam will turn communist. Some might argue that the US is covertly undermining the French and tried to take its place. That's for you to judge but it is not entirely invalid.

The fall of Dien Bien Phu is a huge blunder for the French and exposed the lack of political will and careful/calculated decision-making on the part of the French generals. French prestige as a world power evaporated. This chapter in history sets the stage for greater American involvement and the Vietnam War. I look forward to reading about the Vietnam War next.

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### **Frederic Murray says**

In summation after a 500 pages the book could read:

French Generals: " France will never Leave Indochina"

French Soldiers: "Duck"

I love a history that pulls no punches, with sub-chapter headings like "What the fuck are we doing here?!" Morgan leaves no doubt about where his sympathies lie, that's not a complaint, it is a virtue. Working from a great set of unearthed primary sources, both French & Vietnamese & American he reconstructs the folly of this battle.

It is a painful and maddening read.

Highly recommended, now if I could only find my Eric Burdon 8-Track.

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### **Converse says**

Ted Morgan's *Valley of Death* describes the 1954 French military defeat which led to the end of the French colonial empire in southeast Asia. Dien Bien Phu is in northern Vietnam, near the border with Laos. At the time Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam were all French colonies. The most serious threat to continued French control was an insurgency in Vietnam, especially in the north of the country.

Morgan covers much more than the battle; the book begins with the series of events during the Second World War which gave Ho Chi Minh the opportunity to establish a viable insurgency in northern Vietnam. These events include the Japanese occupation, resignedly accepted by the French who continued to be in of the colonial administration, and then the sudden turning of the Japanese against the French administration in 1945. The latter event created a power vacum that allowed Ho Chi Minh the opportunity to greatly expand his base in northern Vietnam.

Morgan also covers the political maneuvering between France, the United States, China, the Soviet Union, and Britain before and after the French defeat. After the death of President Franklin Roosevelt, the United States gradually moved towards a policy of keeping France in the war, as American opposition to colonialism was replaced by American opposition to communist governments. Thus American political initiatives focused on providing additional support to France, rather than attempting to negotiate an end to the

war. After the French defeat, a new government in France determined upon ending the war through negotiations. A conference in Geneva resulted, where the Soviets and the Chinese pressured the north Vietnamese leadership into accepting partition.

As for the battle itself, the Dien Bien Phu area was occupied by the French in late 1953 in order to support their crumbling position in Laos. After an evacuation of the threatened part of Laos was then quickly decided upon, the base at Dien Bien Phu remained, with the new rationale that it would draw Vietnamese forces away from the more important Red River delta (the general area of Hanoi). Dien Bien Phu is located in a narrow valley surrounded by hills. French forces could only be supplied from the air. The French command didn't think that the Vietnamese would be able to bring in heavy artillery to shell the base and make the landing strip unusable, though they had evidence that the Vietnamese were receiving artillery from China. The French were wrong and the base was heavily shelled after it had been encircled. More troops and supplies were landed by parachute into the base, but not enough to change the outcome.

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### **Sweetwilliam says**

I finished the book – 637 pages - in record time. It was really hard to put down. If this had been a work of fiction I would have criticized the Valley of Death as being too improbable. However, you can't make this stuff up. How did this French disaster happen? Is this just another French military disaster due to French arrogance? From Waterloo to Jean van de Velde's loss at the 1999 British Open, history is full of French disasters like this one.

The story begins in the early 1940's during WWII. According to the author, the French not only collaborated with the Germans in Europe, they also collaborated with the Japanese in Indochina. In fact, the Vichy French annually paid the Japanese for their forces of occupation! The Japanese used Indochina as a base to launch other campaigns without having to worry about the supply lines in their rear thanks to the complicit French. During the war, acreage used to grow rice was diverted to other crops necessary for the Japanese war machine. The rice that was grown in Indochina was hoarded for the Japanese and French leading to the starvation of 2 million Vietnamese. Meanwhile, Ho Chi Min was recruited by the OSS to retrieve downed American pilots and spy on the Japanese. His life was saved by an American medic when he was dying from Malaria. The OSS operatives spoke very highly of him and his friendship could have been further cultivated. Furthermore, FDR proclaimed that colonialism was dead and the French had no right to keep Indochina after the war. This was a sentiment shared by the majority of Americans. It drew jeers from the likes of Winston Churchill who was worried about the UK having to turn over many of their own colonies!

So what happened in a span of a couple years to make things change 180?? China fell to Mao's Red Army and North Korea attacked South Korea. The term the Domino Principle became part of the North American vernacular. The Domino Principle transformed France's imperialism into a crusade against communism. Meanwhile our staunch ally, the United Kingdom, had to give up India and could care less about some French Colony in the middle of nowhere.

The Indochina war quickly became a war of China vs. The USA fighting through surrogates. The Chinese trained and outfitted the Vietminh. This included 105 and 155 howitzers. Meanwhile, the USA was paying for 80% of the Indochina war. Only 8% of the French population supported the war. Also, It was illegal to send conscripts to Indochina and only 25% of the troops fighting in Indochina were from France.

The French plan to defeat the Vietminh was to man outposts referred to by the author as “Beau Geste” forts. The French strategy was to fight protracted defensive battles from static, defensive positions. When it was apparent that this was not a winning strategy the French high command decided upon a new strategy. They would build an even bigger fort in a valley near the Laotian border and call it Dien Bien Phu. This outpost was really the connection of several intertwined strong points that spanned 6 miles in two directions and covered the low ground. Offensive patrols could be mounted from Dien Bien Phu. It would draw the Vietminh from the Delta and it would protect Laos. The hope was that the lightly armed Vietminh forces would make human wave attacks against the highly fortified French position and wreck themselves. The French built an airstrip and there was no way to reinforce the camp or retreat overland. When Eisenhower heard of this plan he said something like “Good God, they’ll be cut to pieces.”

The French folly was apparent almost immediately. It was demonstrated that the French could not mount offensive patrols with any intended purpose without being ambushed. 3 divisions of Vietminh led by Giap were able to surround the encampment. They pushed artillery from China using 100's of coolies per gun and winches and hid them from the French air force in caves in the heights surrounding DBP. The French never thought they would be able to do this. The Viets infiltrated various strongholds and cut the French off one by one. The French paratroops and the Legionnaires (most were ex-Wehrmacht) fought well and so did some of the Vietnamese paratroops but there just weren't enough of them. The Moroccans, Algerians, Thais, and other colonial troops did not fight with the same élan. Their commanding officer De Castries never came out of his bunker once the battle started. The French high command outside of DBP bickered. One of the officers would not drop in replacements until they had made 6 jumps in Hanoi and earned a certificate. The Americans could not decide how to help the French. They couldn't use strategic bombing because the forces were on top of each other and there were few targets when fighting a guerilla army in the jungle. The majority of US Joint Chiefs and Eisenhower did not want to commit troops. Tactical nukes were offered but there was no way to really employ these either. The French were given an aircraft carrier and used it to transport recently sold French planes to Canada. The book is full of ludicrous stories such as this.

The French realized that there was no chance of a military victory without a political solution. The Geneva conference was held while the French were fighting in Dien Bien Phu. The Allies had a tough time presenting a united front. The French were very stubborn and fought amongst themselves. The Americans and French could agree on little. The British could care less about Indochina after having to give up India a few years earlier. Their British minister Eden actually worked to undercut the allied position. Meanwhile the communists seemed to be in lock step.

After a valiant effort the French finally surrendered. This was OK with French high command as long as they did not wave a white flag. Over 10,000 men were marched into captivity and only about 3,000 survived. The French got out of Vietnam and you know the rest of the story.

Read the Valley of Death and then hit me up on Face Book and we can all try to make sense of the French and allied position. I'm still scratching my head.

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## **Dergrossest says**

How could the France which gave us the brilliant Charles Martel, Charlemagne, Turenne, de Saxe and, of course, the incomparable Napoleon, have given us the nincompoops responsible for the idiocy which was Dien Bien Phu? It is hard to read as elite French Paratroopers and Foreign Legionnaires (largely comprised

of ex-Waffen SS survivors of Stalingrad) are knowingly placed into a death-trap and bravely die in the face of overwhelming odds, incompetent senior staff officers and cowardly politicians. And all for maintaining a colonial system whose time had clearly long past. It all seems so impossibly delusional, until you remember that the United States would soon choose the same path, ignore the lessons of Dien Bien Phu and needlessly send almost 60,000 Americans to their death. Truman, Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles all have blood on their hands for this folly.

Indeed, almost no one comes off well in this sorry tale which is brilliantly told, except perhaps the intrepid, but merciless (particularly to their unlucky captives), Vietminh who seem to have been fighting for independence more than Communism. The Chinese and Russians betray Ho Chi Minh, the British betray their alleged allies in a pathetic attempt to remain relevant and retain Burma, while the Americans betray their own ideals, as well as any notions of common sense, in deference to the ridiculous “domino” theory.

This is a must read for anyone who wants to understand the American experience in Vietnam or why the modern Neo-Cons are such idiots.

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### **Danny Knobler says**

Very detailed, but manages not to get bogged down. Alternates between battles and diplomacy, and goes through a lot of Vietnam history that isn't that well known in this country.

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### **Matt says**

Some weeks after reading Ted Morgan's *Valley of Death*, I was whiling away a lazy Saturday channel surfing and watching the baby lay on her play mat while speaking in her magical nothing-language to a stuffed lion. I was also desperately hung over and looking for something, anything, to take my mind off my stomach.

Finally, I settled on the History Channel's all-day marathon of *Vietnam in HD*, which is a handsomely constructed documentary, incongruous only for the fact that four of the leads of *Entourage* provided voice work. (At this point, the baby was taken to another room). I watched nearly all six hours of the program (excluding bathroom breaks for myself, and diaper breaks for the baby), and at the end, hadn't learned much at all.

This is not to blame the History Channel. To the contrary, I applaud them every time they introduce programming that doesn't involve pawn shop owners. It's just that *Vietnam in HD* didn't set out with a pedagogical aim. Instead, it was experiential and anecdotal, focusing on individual participants rather than overall strategy and policy.

That's really where we're at with Vietnam.

As a nation, we're still processing its impact. It is still too soon for sound and measured judgments. Often, reading about Vietnam is like poking at an unhealed wound. The war is too recent and too complicated to draw bold historical conclusions.

Except for the battle of Dien Bien Phu, the subject of *Valley of Death*.

Compared to the irregular, asymmetrical jungle warfare between the United States Armed Forces and the North Vietnamese, Dien Bien Phu is a marvel of understandability.

The battle was fought in March-May 1954, and pitted a French Expeditionary Force (French paratroopers, Foreign Legionnaires, Colonial forces, and friendly Vietnamese) against the Viet Minh troops under Vo Nguyen Giap. The French established a *base aero-terrestre* (essentially a fortified landing strip) deep in northern Vietnam, essentially daring the Viet Minh to attack. Despite daunting logistical difficulties, Giap did just that, laying siege to the French airbase.

The battle developed along static lines that would've been familiar to a World War I infantryman (indeed, in the famous conception of French commander Christian de Castries, Dien Bien Phu was like "Verdun, without the Sacred Way"). The French were cut off and surrounded and relied on airdrops for supplies. However, despite some grudging assistance from the United States, the French did not have enough planes and pilots to land sufficient materiel. Moreover, as the Viet Minh closed the noose, it became increasingly dangerous for planes to land.

The French begged the United States to intervene militarily; the United States refused. Dien Bien Phu fell to Giap. This led to the inevitable French retreat from Vietnam. The irony, of course, is that the United States took France's place within a decade, fighting the same war that it could have helped France execute at Dien Bien Phu.

Dien Bien Phu is a clear turning point in the tangled history of Southeast Asia. It is also a historical moment of high drama. For easterners, it is a story of a long-colonized people throwing off their arrogant oppressors. For westerners, it is another in a long line of "epics of defeat," in which some moral succor is taken from a doomed battle against long odds. In either case, it is a story that is ~~impossible~~ almost impossible to screw up.

Well, I'm here to state my opinion that Ted Morgan screwed it up.

The problems with this book – and there are many – can be boiled down to a lack of focus. Despite its lazy and generic title, *Valley of Death* is really about almost everything except the actual battle of Dien Bien Phu. All the secondary aspects of this event are brought to the forefront; meanwhile, the central event, with all its drama and high stakes, recedes into the background.

This central problem is noticeable right away. Interestingly, it manifests itself as a problem of context. In this case, way too much context. I understand this is an odd thing to say. After all, everybody loves context ("context is everything" etc., etc.). In this case, though, the context overwhelms and confuses the story with needless factoids, secondary personages, and myriad unnecessary complications.

The first 86 pages or so is devoted to an overly-detailed discussion of French colonialism, World War II, and the French reoccupation. Here, 86 pages is both too long and too short. It's too long for a book about a single battle; it's too short for a full explanation. The resulting reading experience feels crammed-in. And it doesn't really have to be this way. The focus of the book should be the battle of Dien Bien Phu. The context should be told, not shown. Morgan, though, goes the other way. As a consequence, I immediately bogged down in minor matters. For instance, in a book about Dien Bien Phu, there certainly doesn't need to be an entire paragraph devoted to the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, which names each of the battleships sunk during the battle.

Perhaps the best example of this troubling lack of focus can be found in the photographic insert. There are sixteen pages of black and white pictures (of stunningly poor quality), with a total of 29 photos. Of these 29 photos, there are two of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the American president who died nearly a decade before Dien Bien Phu, one photograph of Castries, the French commander, and zero pictures of the Viet Minh commander Giap, or of other French leaders such as Langlais and Navarre.

As the narrative lurched forward, Morgan continues to catalogue minutiae, while failing to develop a clear picture of French strategy. In Morgan's hands, the decision to build a *base aero-terrestre* close to the Laotian border, supplied only by airdrops, is never fully explained. Morgan does the bare minimum in explaining the French *hérisson* ("hedgehog") approach, or how that tactic came about during the successful defense of Na San by French Group Mobile 7.

I'm not saying this aspect is completely ignored. I'm saying that Na San, a battle that tragically gave the French false hope for future operations, is given a whopping four pages.

Where is Morgan's attention, then? It's on the palace intrigue.

Despite the title, and the subtitle, and the picture of soldiers on the front cover, *Valley of Death* is a diplomatic history. With some sort of balance, with careful segues from jungle-to-conference room, this would've been just fine. Simply telling the story of a battle, after all, without any of its wider meaning, would be a waste. But Morgan doesn't try to find a balance, and his shifting perspectives have all the subtlety of a sledgehammer to the cheek. One paragraph is in Washington; the next in Dien Bien Phu; and then suddenly we're in Geneva.

The main irritant (leaving aside the clumsy edititing), as before, is misplaced detail. I totally lost count of the number of inanities that Morgan stuffs into the narrative. In one instance, he takes the time to give the reader General Paul Ely's flight number! ("Ely landed at New York's Idlewild Airport at 6:30 p.m. on Saturday, March 20, aboard TWA flight 931. The transatlantic voyage in those propeller-driven days took fourteen hours..."). In the meantime, back in Vietnam, men are fighting and dying, but the author barely seems to care. He's more interested in the grade-D Machiavellian machinations of the French diplomatic delegations.

With regards to the diplomatic negotiations, a little would've gone a long way. Morgan feels differently, and these backdoor conversations (will America intervene to help the French or not? Pretend you don't know the answer and keep reading!) really form the spine of the book. Morgan presents a lot of this stuff as revelatory; the problem, though, is that this is a poorly sourced book. The notes are threadbare and next to worthless, mostly containing naked citations to secondary sources. I need to know about where these verbatim conversations are coming from.

When Morgan actually takes the time to discuss the battle, the product is a shambles. His narrative on the battle is nearly impossible to follow. He does a poor job explaining the layout of the battle-site, the makeup of the troops, and the personalities of the commanders. All this is made worse by his tendency to cut away from the battle for long periods of time, to linger on the diplomats. By the time Morgan returns the story to the battle, you've forgotten who is who.

Furthermore, the two battle maps included in the book are near to worthless. Dien Bien Phu is an inherently difficult battle to follow. It wasn't comprised of a single fortress, like the Alamo, which was overwhelmed by a horde of Viet Minh in one great charge. Rather, it was a series of strong-points, named after women (Eliane, Claudine, Gabrielle, etc.), ringing the airfield. These outposts fell, were retaken, and fell again at different times during the course of the fighting. It is a complicated chronology, one that requires a lot of

discipline to explain. As noted before, that discipline is lacking.

I was further frustrated, throughout *Valley of Death*, by Morgan's style of writing. He breaks every chapter up into dozens of subheadings (an average of one subheading per page). I don't know why he did this, or what positive outcome he hoped to obtain. For me, it caused an already unfocused and stuttering narrative to become even more disjointed. Of course, I might just be getting crotchety. Perhaps this is the future of writing, in which even serious history books have to be broken down into easily-digestible soundbites for an audience weaned on Twitter and blog posts.

Normally, I try to avoid name-dropping other books when I write a review. This will be an exception.

Dien Bien Phu is a fascinating world-historical event. The battle's outcome meant the end of French colonial rule, the beginning of American intervention, and ultimately the most divisive war in U.S. history, one that killed thousands of men, wounded many thousands more, alienated a generation, and caused a socio-political rift that exists to this day.

So if you're interested in Dien Bien Phu, read Bernard Fall's *Hell in a Very Small Place* or Martin Windrow's *The Last Valley*. Neither are perfect, but both do a far better job in telling the story of this singularly important battle.

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### **Bob Mobley says**

Ted Morgan's look at the twisting and changing fortunes leading the United States into the Vietnam War is an insightful examination of the trap placed upon our Strategic thinking by "Washington." Read in conjunction with Washington Rules, you will be very disturbed by the shortsighted views and positions held within the State Department and The Department of Defense. This is a book that looks at the quicksands surrounding leadership when decision makers allow their egos, and sense of power, to cloud their judgement, realities of the situation and fail to ask the key question, "What constitutes winning?" The "lessons" in Ted Morgan's book are meaningful and very relevant for us today. This book should be required reading for all individuals whose decisions can put our military into environments where there is no "winning."

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### **Barbara M says**

Well, I read most of this book. I had to skip some of the accounts of technical military maneuvers, they were beyond me. But, this is an excellent book if you're interested in the topic. It's very well researched and organized. I learned a lot.

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### **Ryan says**

A very detailed and comprehensive account of the development of the Dien Bien Phu conflict, from the seeds of its beginning at the end of WW2 to the catastrophe it evolved into and how the Americans got increasingly embroiled in the conflict at every step of the way. A reference book for historians, this heavy tome made for difficult reading at times for the casual person, with its huge cast of historical figures, not just

soldiers but diplomats and politicans, and coverage of seemingly trivial developments in excruciating detail. It was too longwinded and deviated too much from the actual battle for my taste. Made it through 3/4 of the book.

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