



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.

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