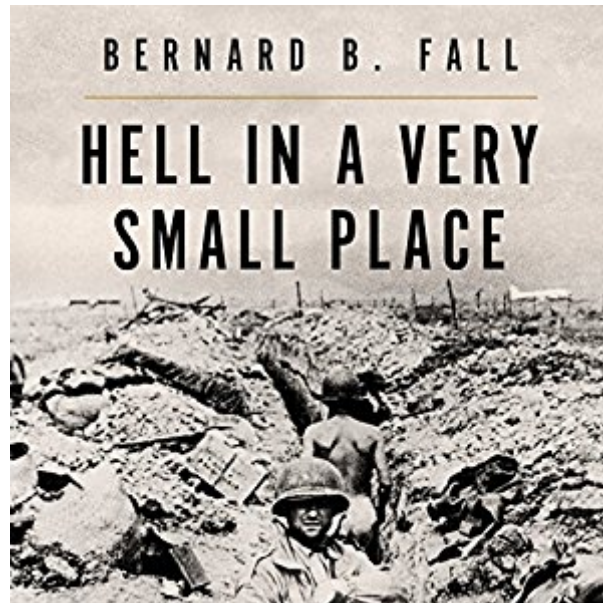


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Hell In A Very Small Place: The Siege Of Dien Bien Phu



Synopsis

Like Gettysburg, Stalingrad, Midway, and Tet, the battle at Dien Bien Phu - a strategic attack launched by France against the Vietnamese in 1954 after eight long years of war - marked a historic turning point. By the end of the 56-day siege, a determined Viet Minh guerrilla force had destroyed a large tactical French colonial army in the heart of Southeast Asia. The Vietnamese victory would not only end French occupation of Indochina and offer a sobering premonition of the US' future military defeat in the region but would also provide a new model of modern warfare in which size and sophistication didn't always dictate victory. Before his death in Vietnam in 1967, Bernard Fall, a critically acclaimed scholar and reporter, drew upon declassified documents from the French Defense Ministry and interviews with thousands of surviving French and Vietnamese soldiers to weave a compelling account of the key battle of Dien Bien Phu. With Fall's thorough and insightful analysis, *Hell in a Very Small Place* has become one of the benchmarks in war reportage.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is it! This is the book that should be in the library of every serious student of the Indo-China War. While this book concerns itself with primarily one battle in the war that occupied France from 1946 through 1954, what a battle it was! The Battle of Dien Bien Phu (March 13-May 8, 1954) was not as long as some, but it played such an important role in what was to follow that years after the fact, the name Dien Bien Phu is still met with equal amounts of disdain for French folly and admiration for the resolve of the Viet Minh, who ultimately defeated the best of the French Expeditionary Corps. The late Bernard B. Fall has provided history students with a masterpiece of research, writing and

scholarship. He first came to the attention of American military, political and diplomatic leaders in the early 1960s with his quintessential look at the French war effort in STREET WITHOUT JOY. He followed that success with HELL IN A VERY SMALL PLACE, which ironically was first released in early 1967, just weeks after the author was killed on Highway 1 (the old RC 1 - the Street Without Joy) while on patrol with United States Marines. When the reader first opens this one volume history, he encounters the reasons for the French seizure of a valley 175 miles from their headquarters and main source of supply. The French High Command in Tonkin decided that controlling this valley would deny the Viet Minh access to the highlands of neighboring Laos and the mountain peoples who were more loyal to the French than they were to the Vietnamese. After the airborne assault on the valley on 20 November 1953, the French consolidated their position and began to fortify the valley floor.

I came of age during the Viet Nam War. It was a time of turmoil and discontent as a nation. The "lessons" we learned then now seem to have been faulty in many ways and the mistakes of the past are influencing the present. However, before America had to face the Vietnamese dilemma, it was France that first faced the challenge. As a youth, I knew of the critical battle of Dien Bien Phu but, until I read Bernard Fall's "The Siege of Dien Bien Phu", my understanding of that battle was as faulty as my understanding of the American Vietnamese experience. I had known that Dien Bien Phu was a battle that saw a technologically challenged Viet Minh army riding bikes to the remote location while superiorly trained French forces looked to carry the day. The ability of the Viet Minh to surprise the French with their numbers and armaments led to a quick demise that saw the French army surrender in shame. Well, now I know better. Like the book "We were Soldiers Once...And Young", "The Siege of Dien Bien Phu" is a masterfully told account of a battle with keen insight as to what went wrong and what could have gone right. The litany of errors made by the French led to more and more setbacks until only a miracle (in the form of massive US Air Force involvement) could have rescued the day. What impressed me the most after finishing this book, was the heroics of both sides and the ability of the French to nearly pull out a victory. In the end I was dismayed to discover that far more French soldiers died in captivity than did in battle. In another Asiatic "Long March" reminiscent of the Bataan Death March, many weakened fighting men died and even more died once they got to their prison camps.

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