



The battle of Dienbienphu

Jules Roy

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Forty years ago, France's war with the anticolonial Communist-led Vietminh insurgency climaxed in the bloody battle for the valley of Dienbienphu. The Vietminh's victory put the 17 million people of North Vietnam under Communist rule and would, in two years, induce America's attempt to save South Vietnam—without heeding the French army's catastrophic defeat. That defeat, former French soldier Jules Roy explains, occurred not because of a shortage of arms or troops, but more important, less tangible reasons. Hungry for a textbook victory, the French military command occupied the valley in a plan to lure the Vietminh down from the hills to destroy them with supposedly superior artillery. Roy vividly shows how French political infighting in Paris and rivalry in the high command left a few romantic professional officers and soldiers of the French Expeditionary Corps and the Foreign Legion to be surrounded and then overwhelmed by totally dedicated and resourceful enemy forces. Roy also profiles Vietminh soldiers and commanders and how they ended over eighty years of French colonial rule in North Vietnam. 16 pages of black-and-white photographs add to a "moving and dramatic" (New York Times Book Review) account of the battle that led to America's involvement the Vietnam War.

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